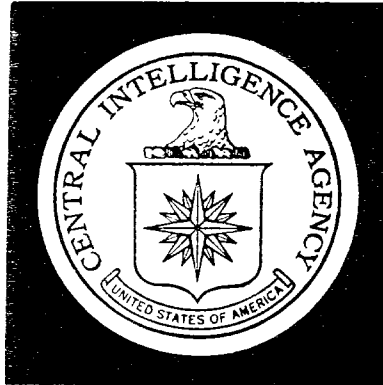


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The Church in Latin America
A Country-by-Country Survey

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9 October 1969
No. 2609/69

W A R N I N G

This document contains information affecting the national defense of the United States, within the meaning of Title 18, sections 793 and 794, of the US Code, as amended. Its transmission or revelation of its contents to or receipt by an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and
declassification

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THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

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Note: This memorandum was prepared in response to NSSM-68 and was approved by the National Security Council's Interdepartmental Group for Inter-American Affairs on 9 October 1969. It was produced by the Office of Current Intelligence of the Central Intelligence Agency and coordinated within the Agency by the Clandestine Service and the Office of National Estimates. It was coordinated also with the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the Department of State.

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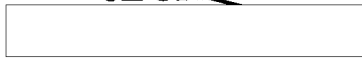
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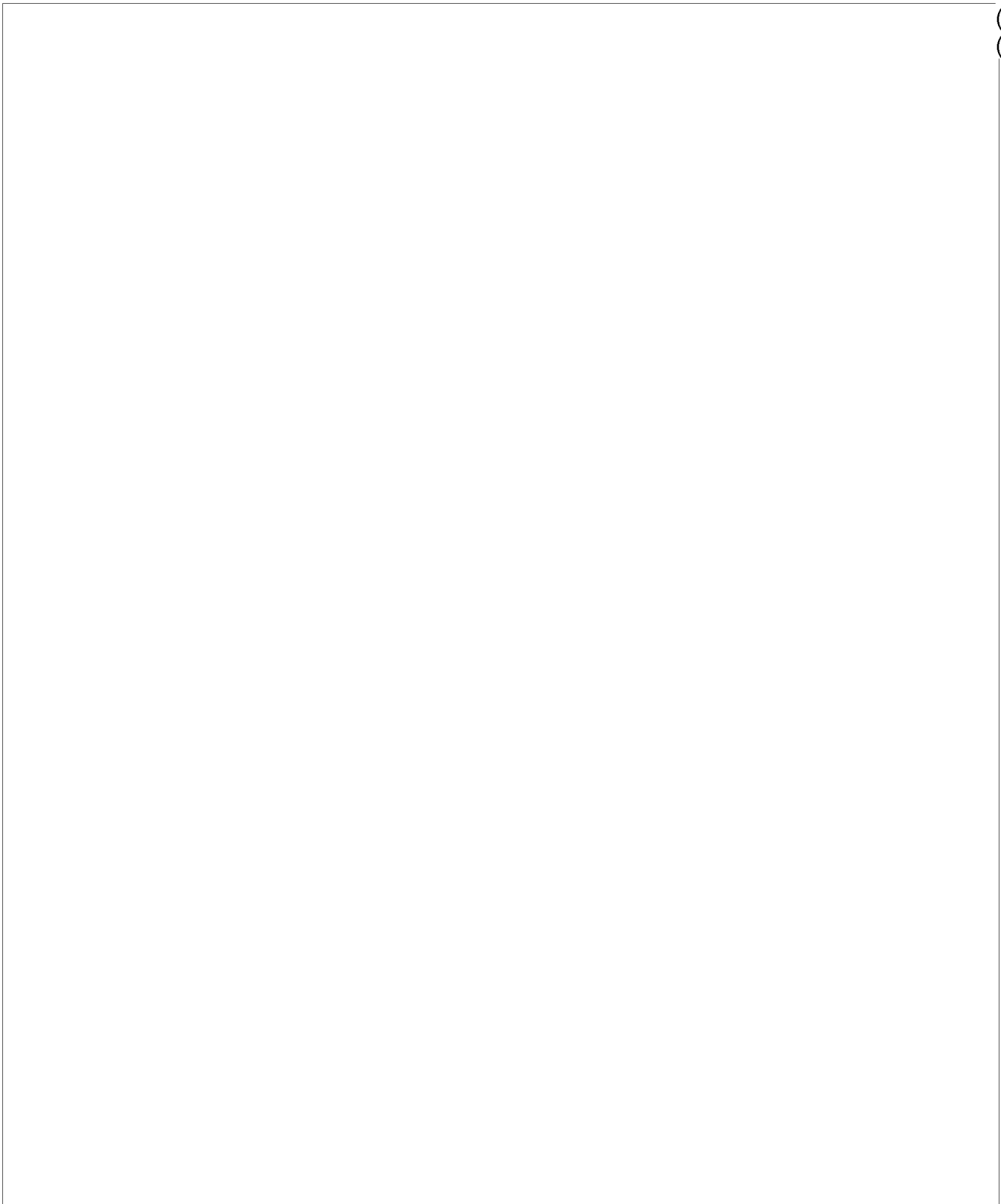
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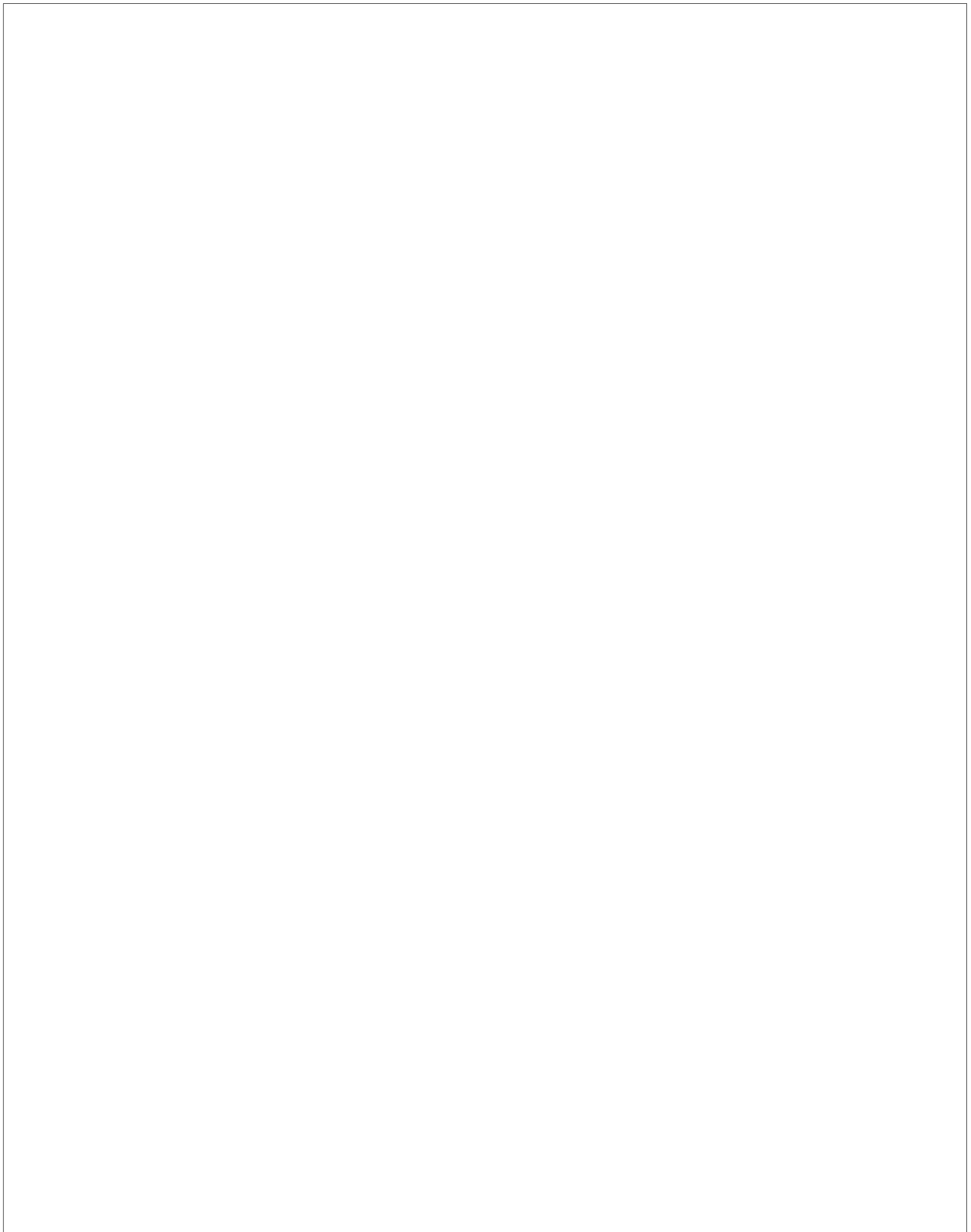
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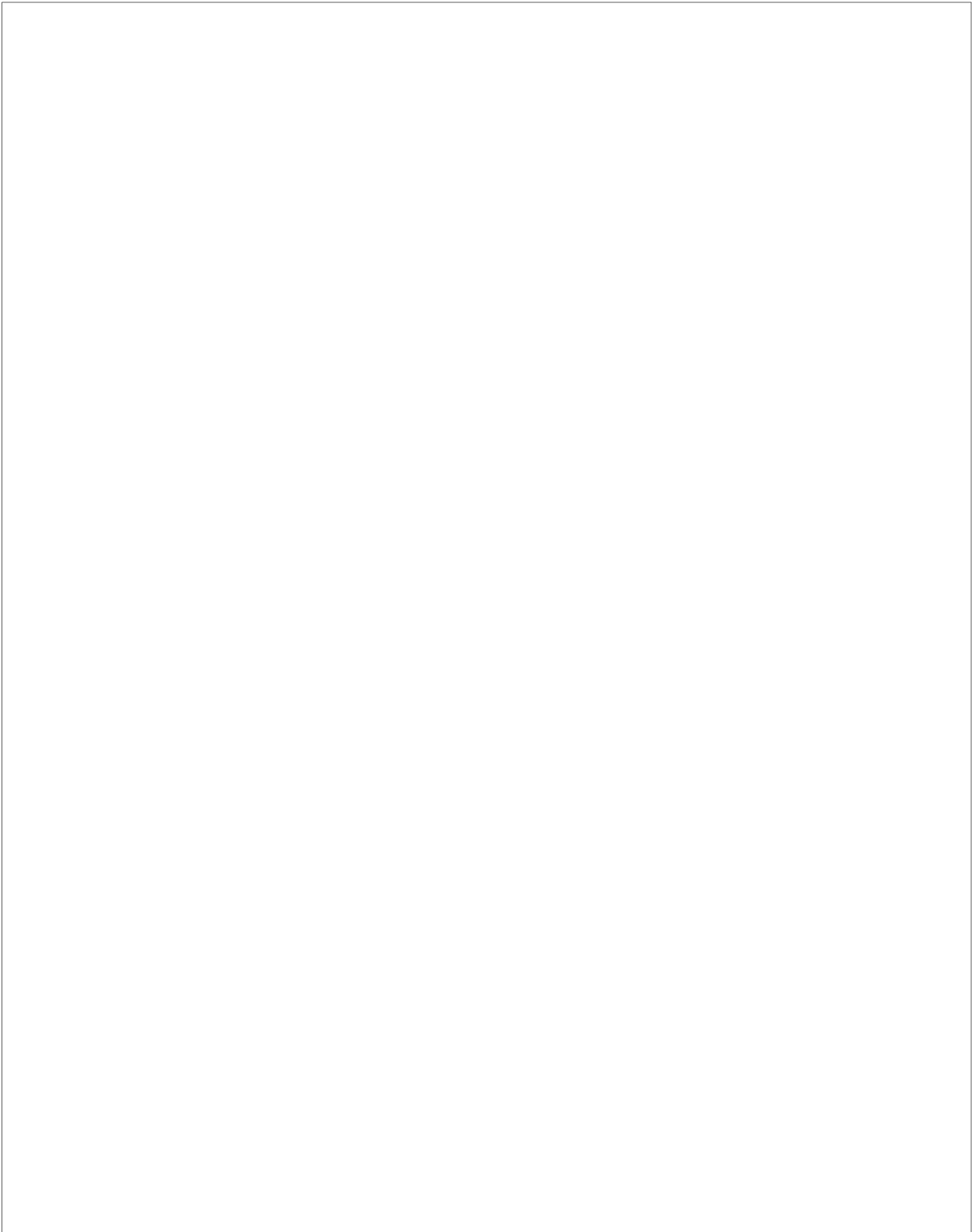
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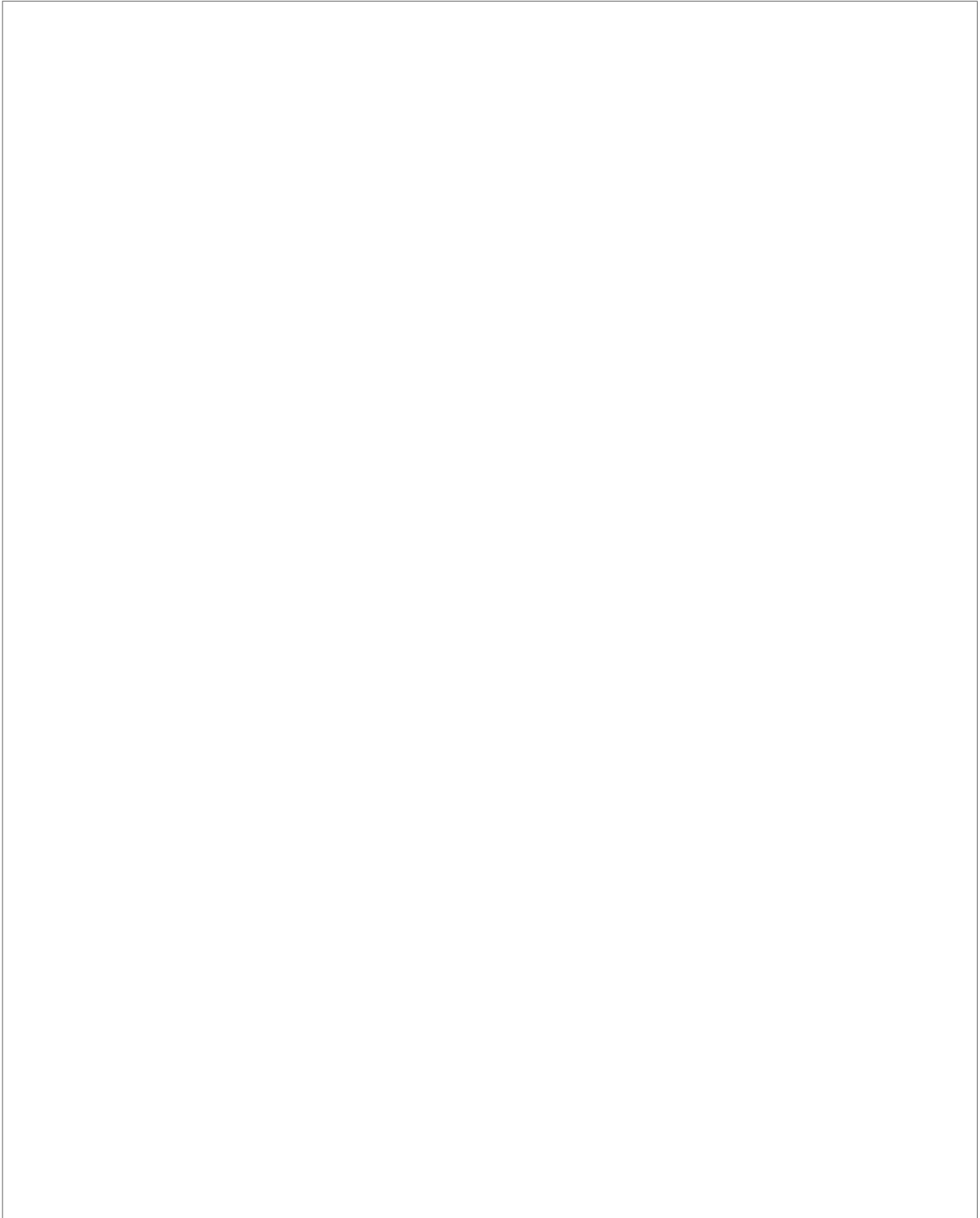


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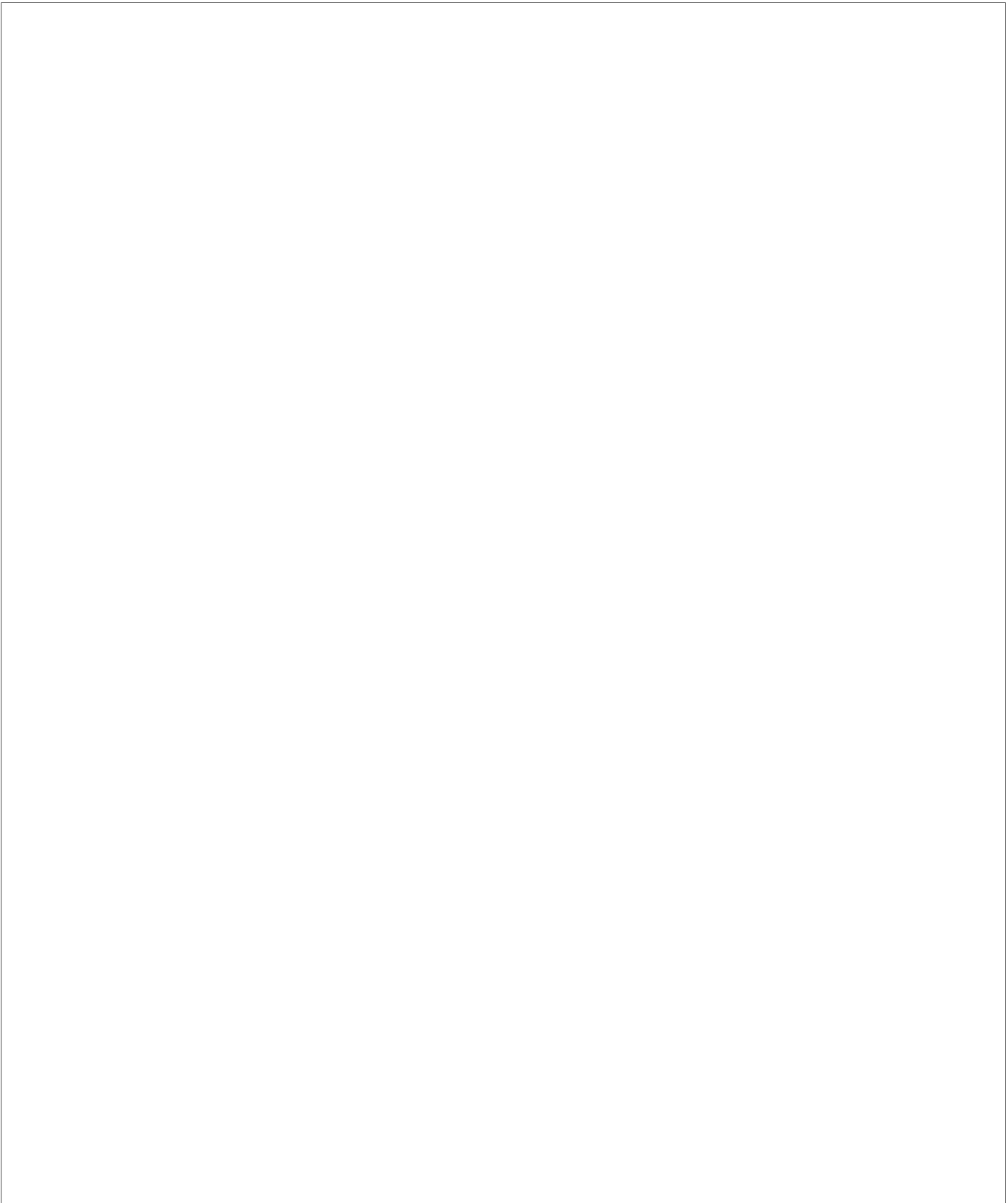
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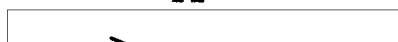
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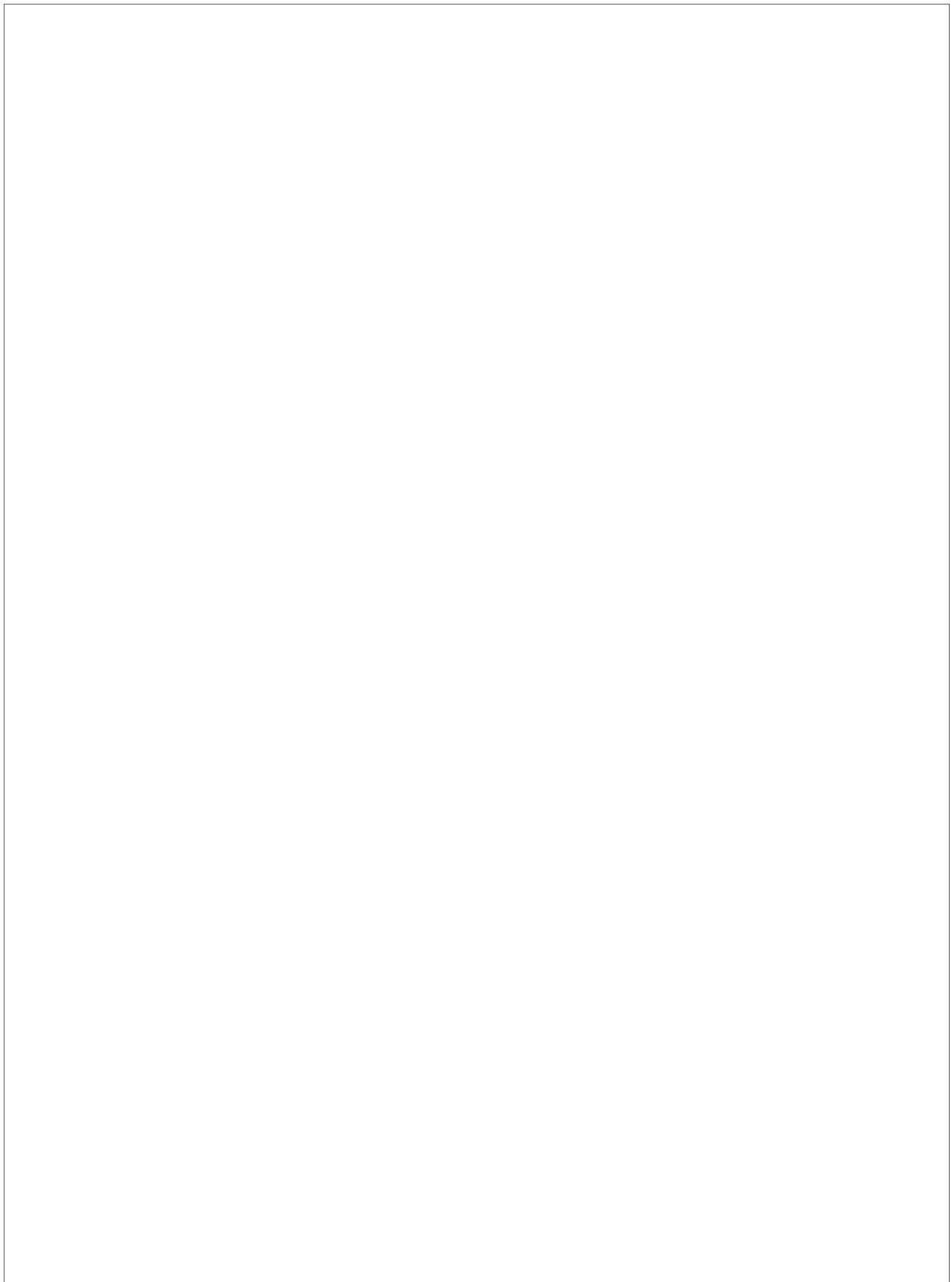
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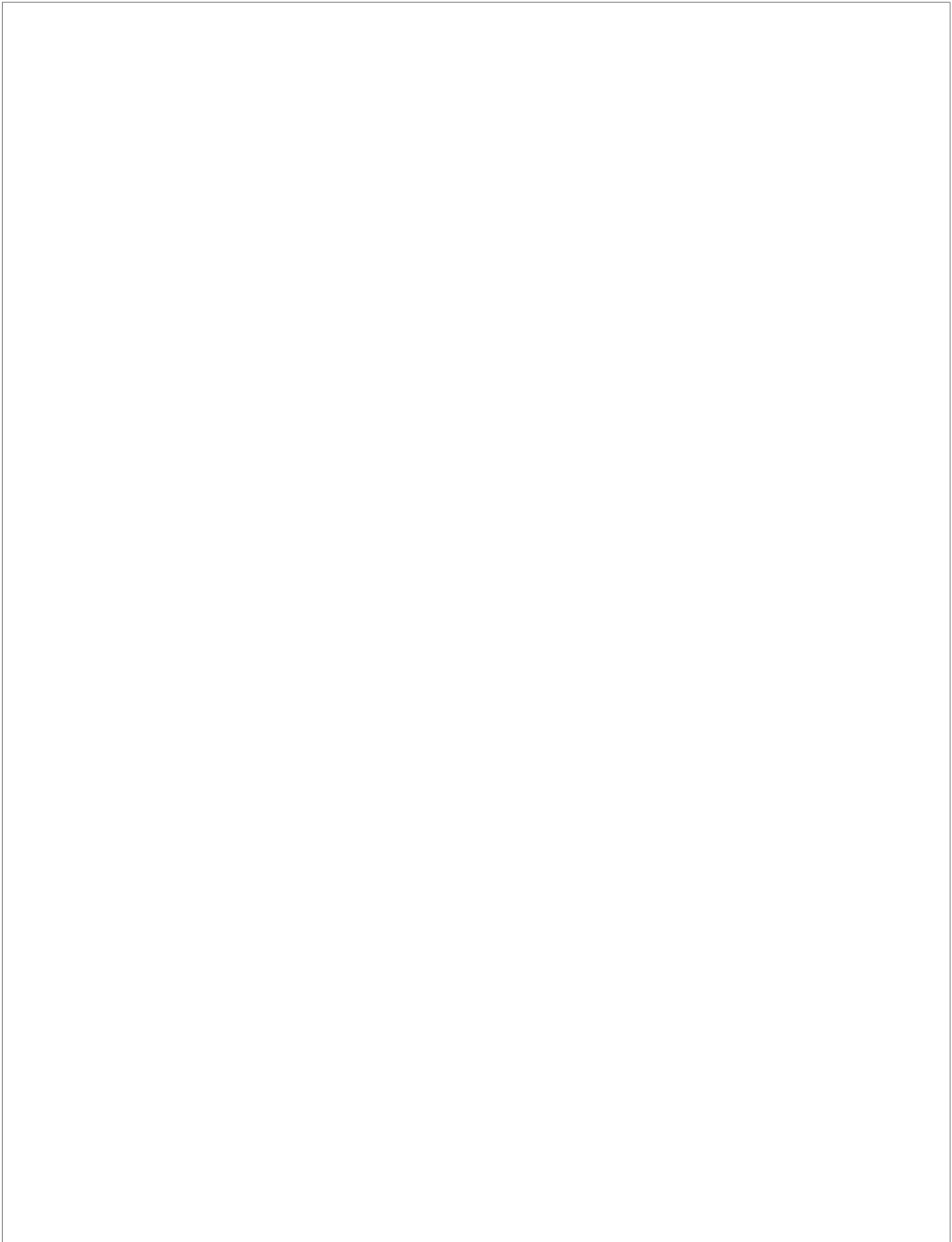
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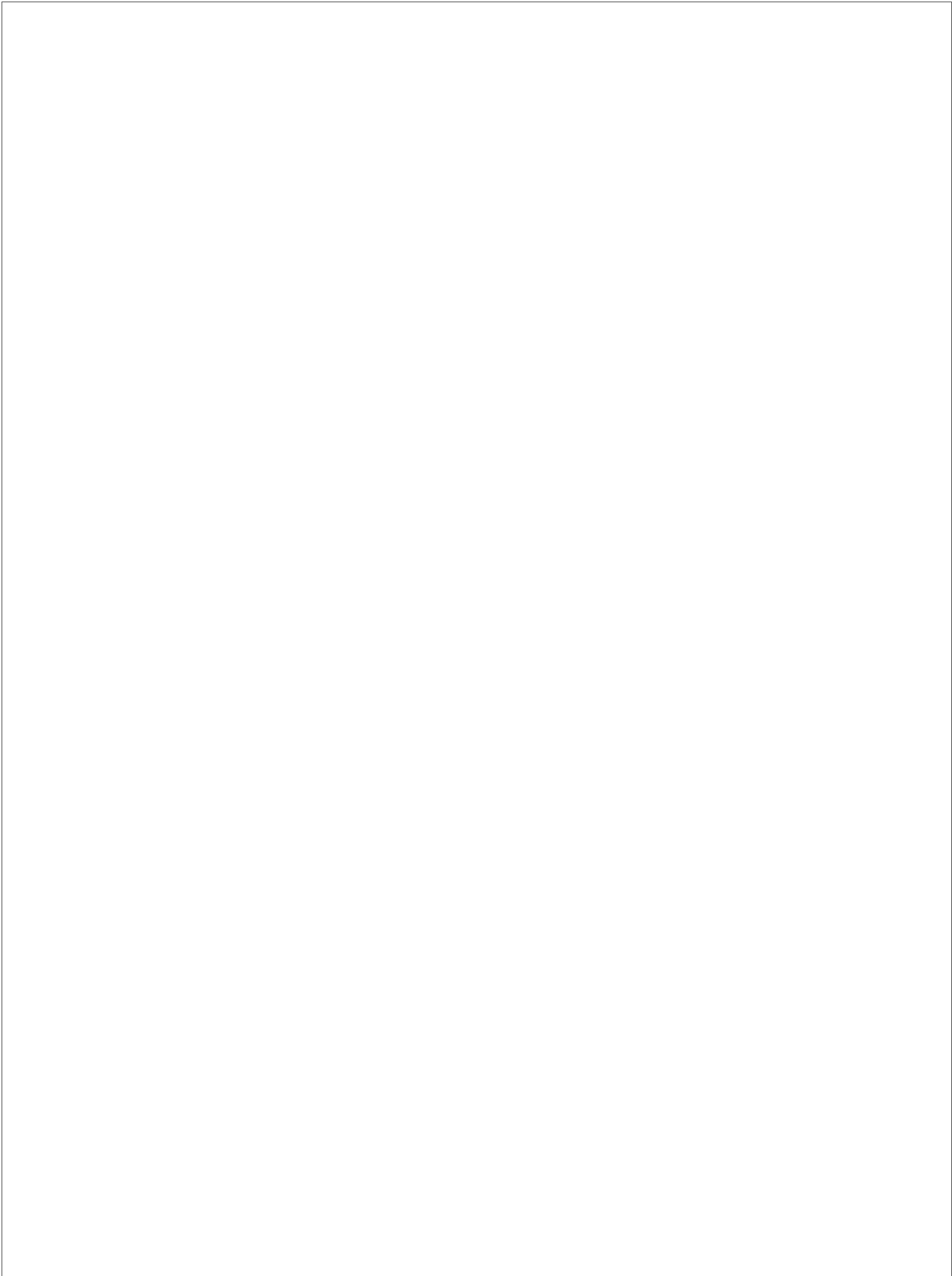
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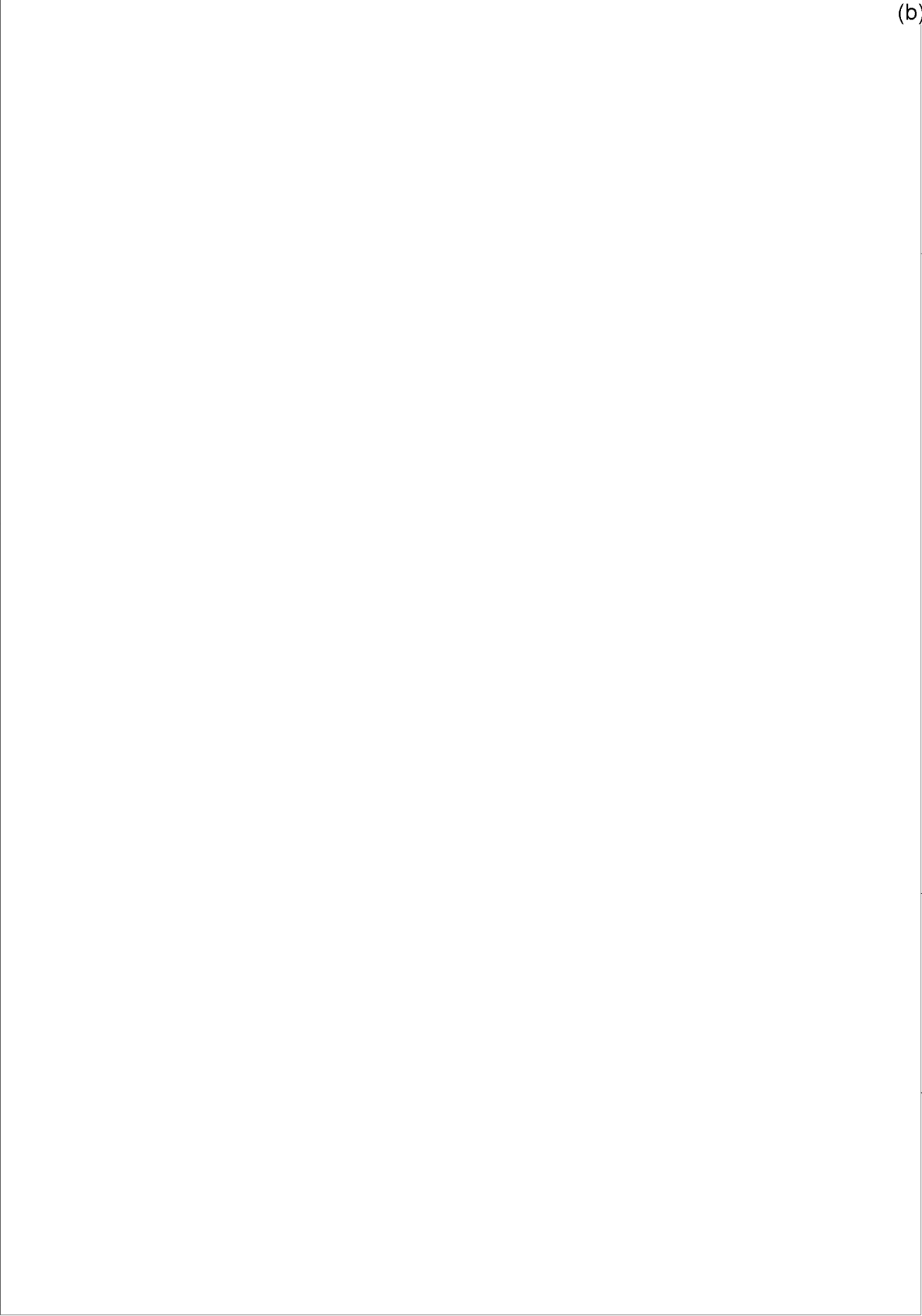
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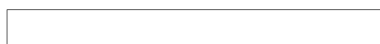


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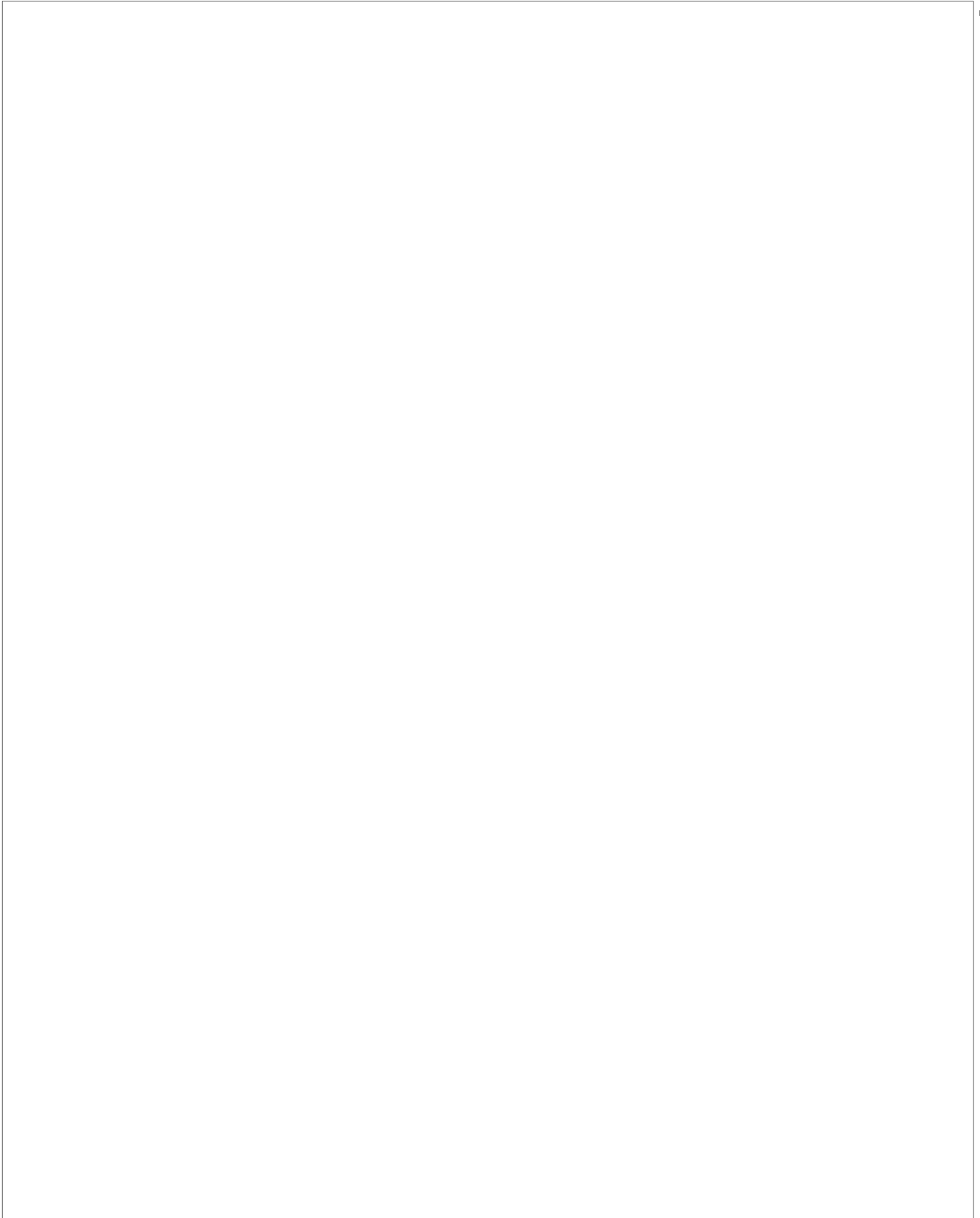
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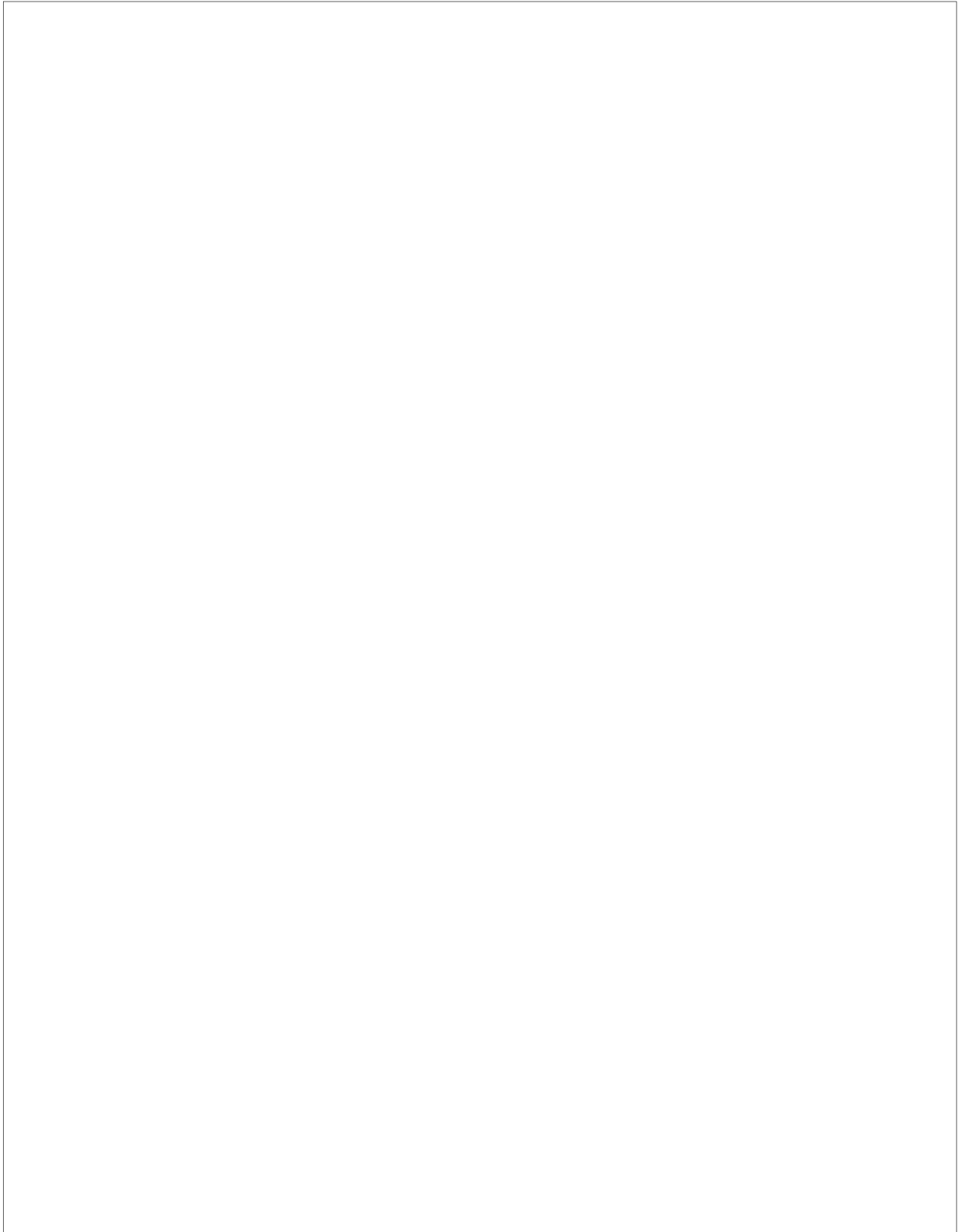
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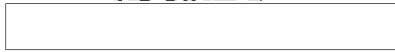
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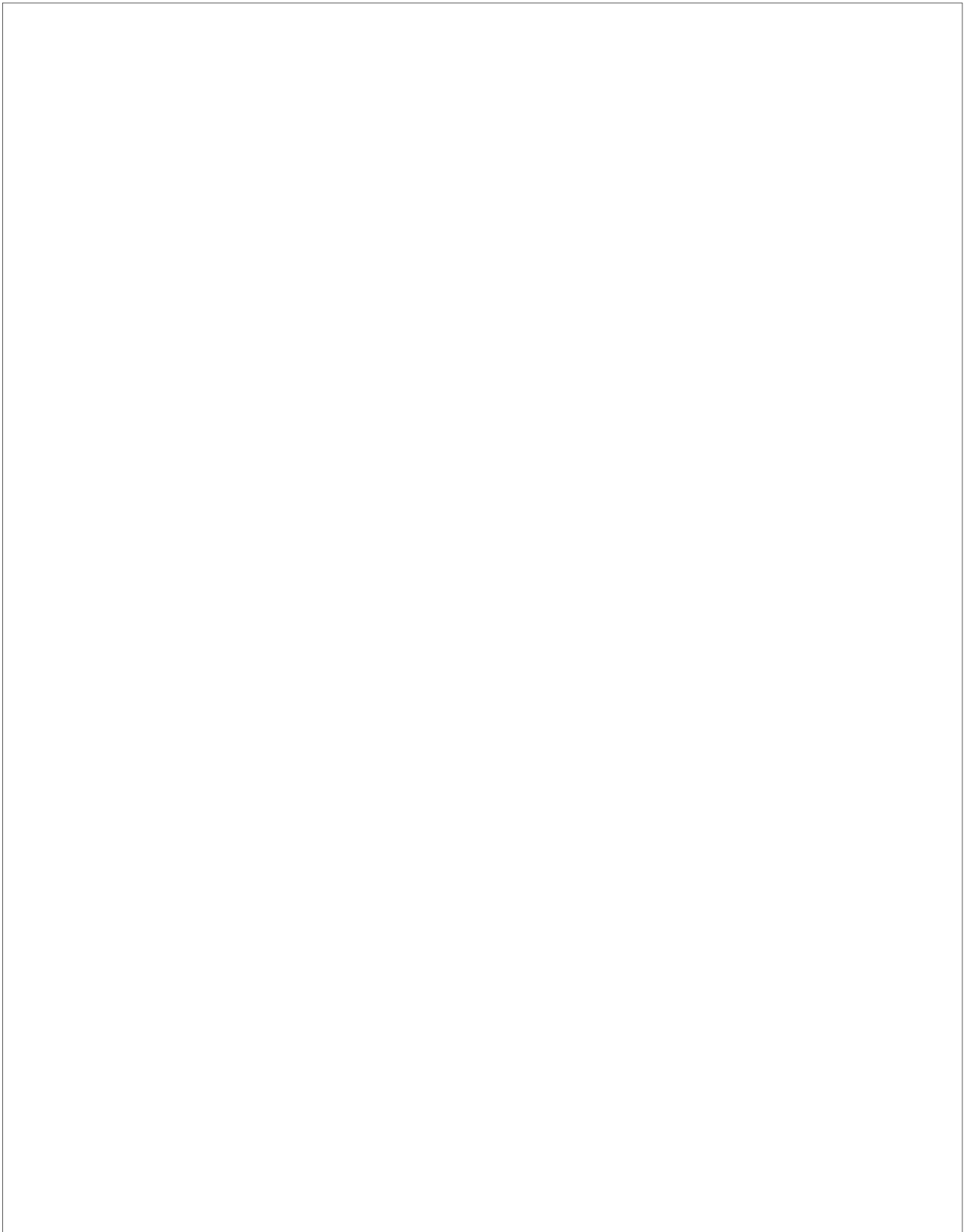
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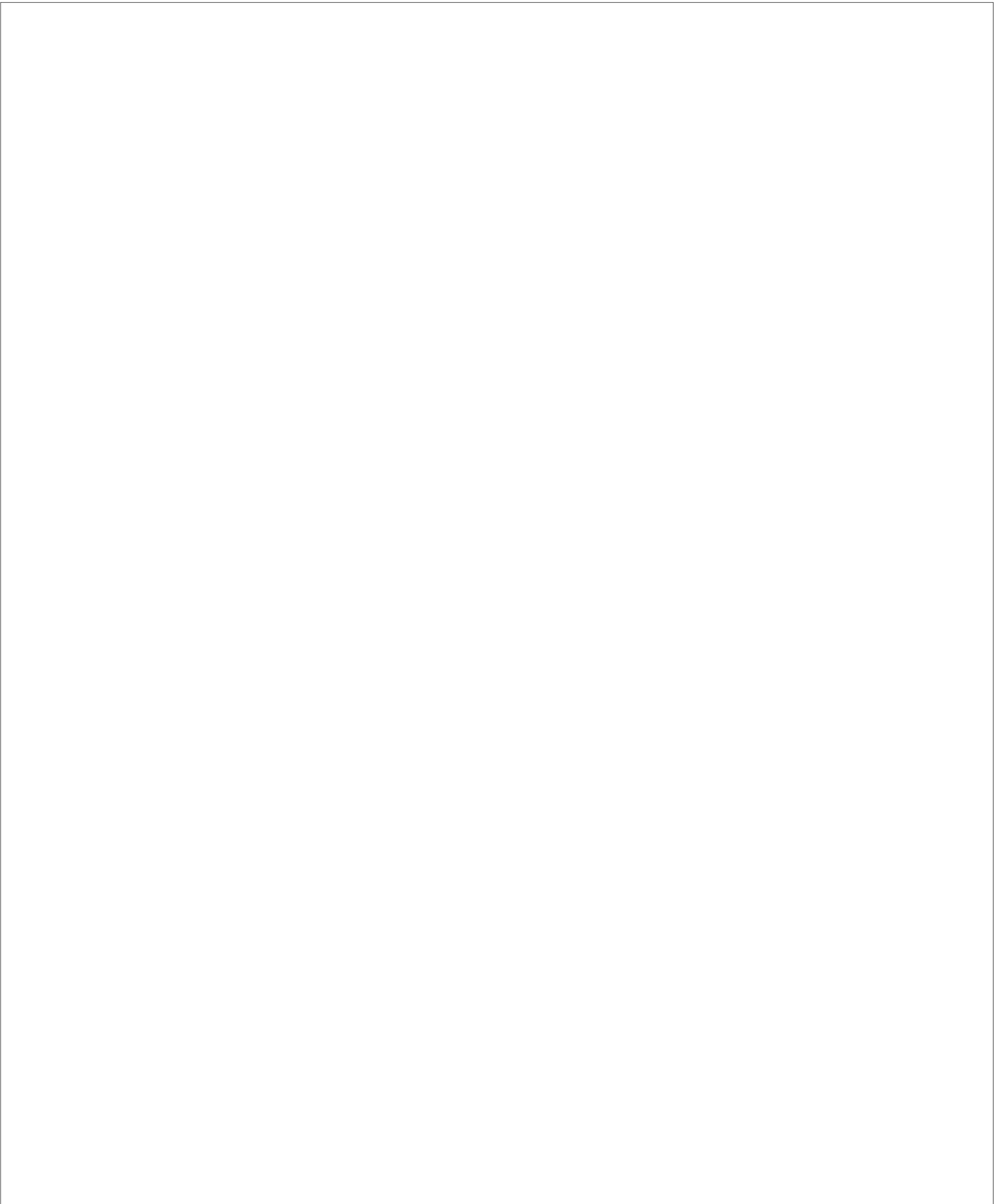
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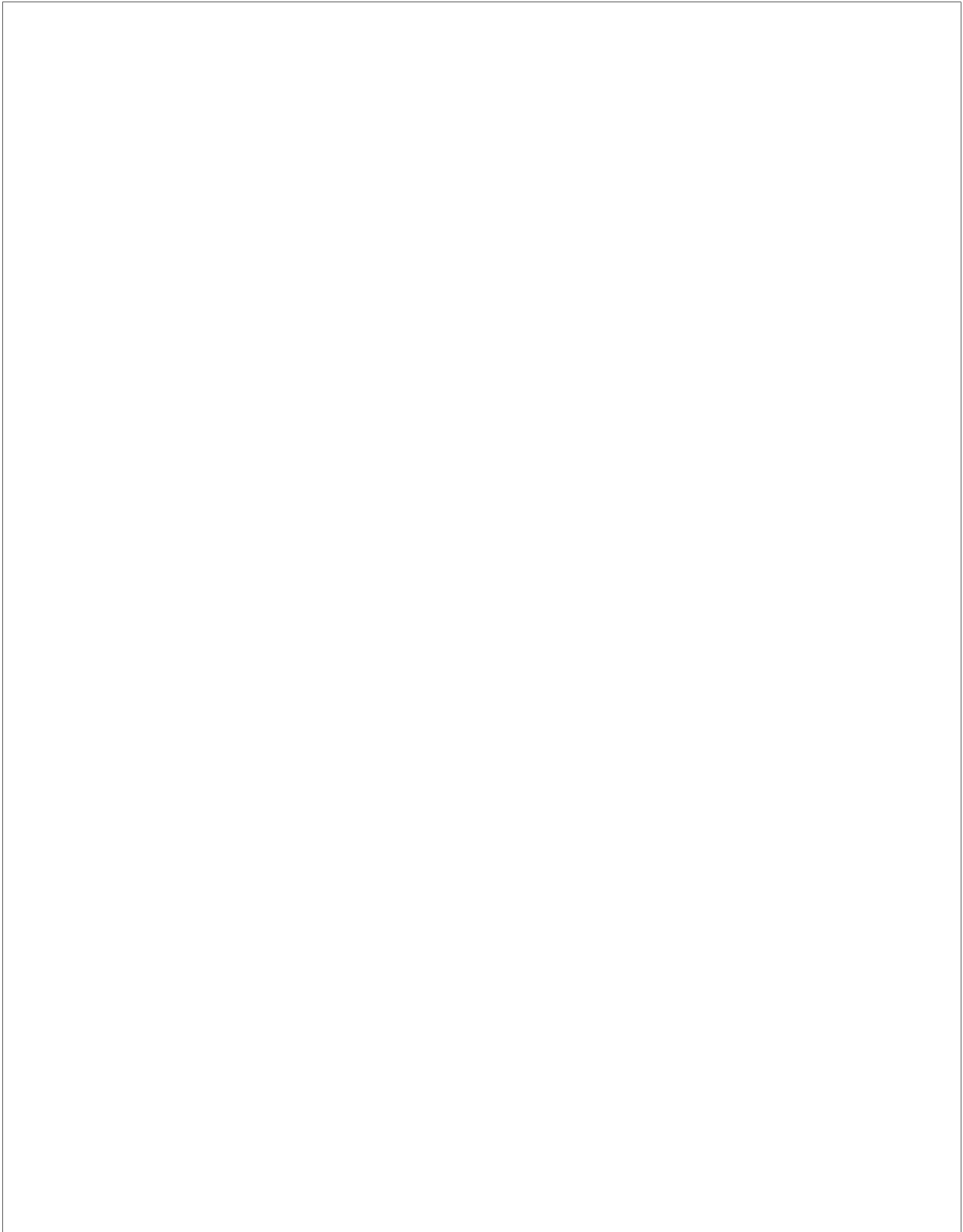
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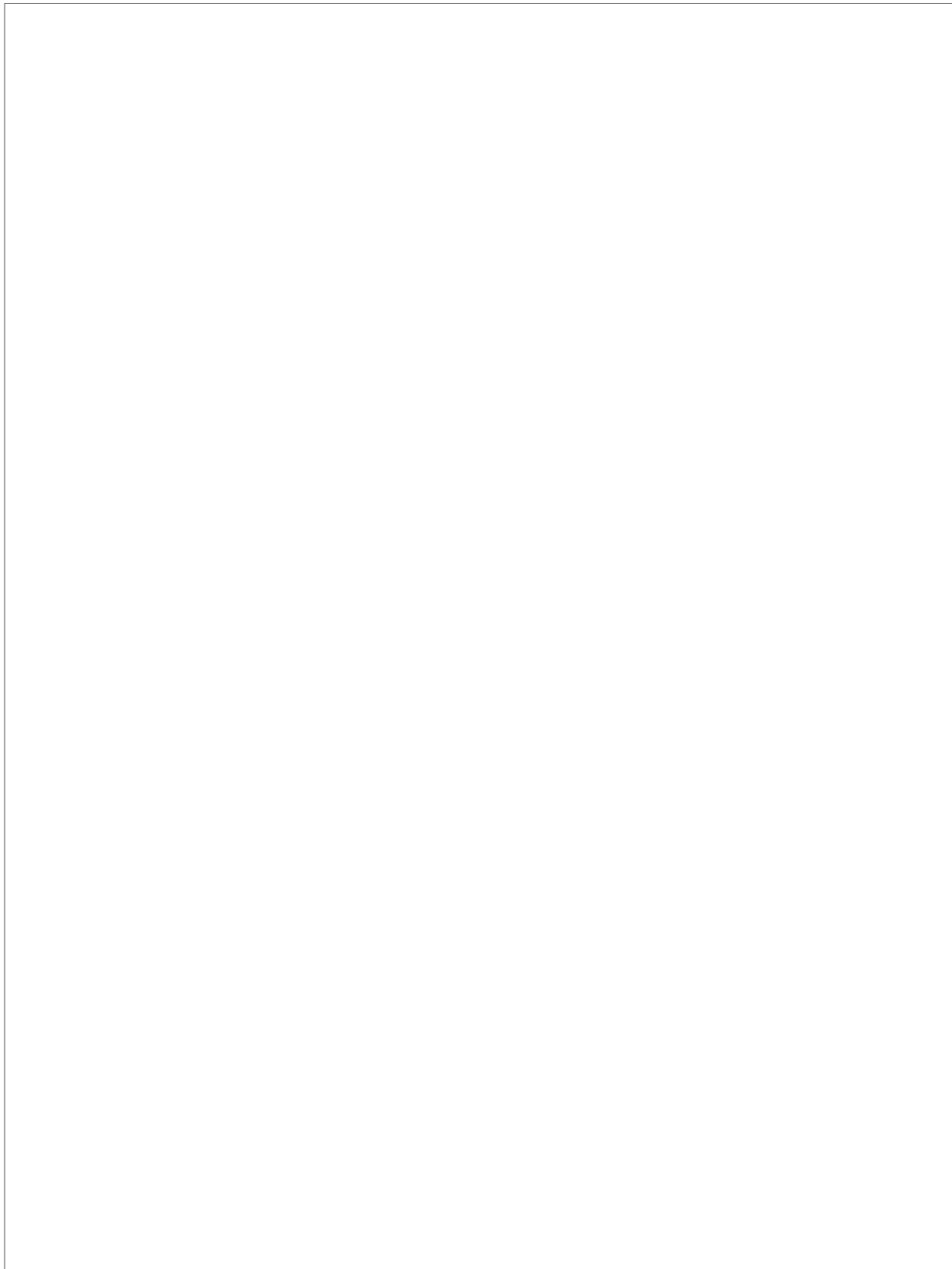
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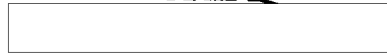
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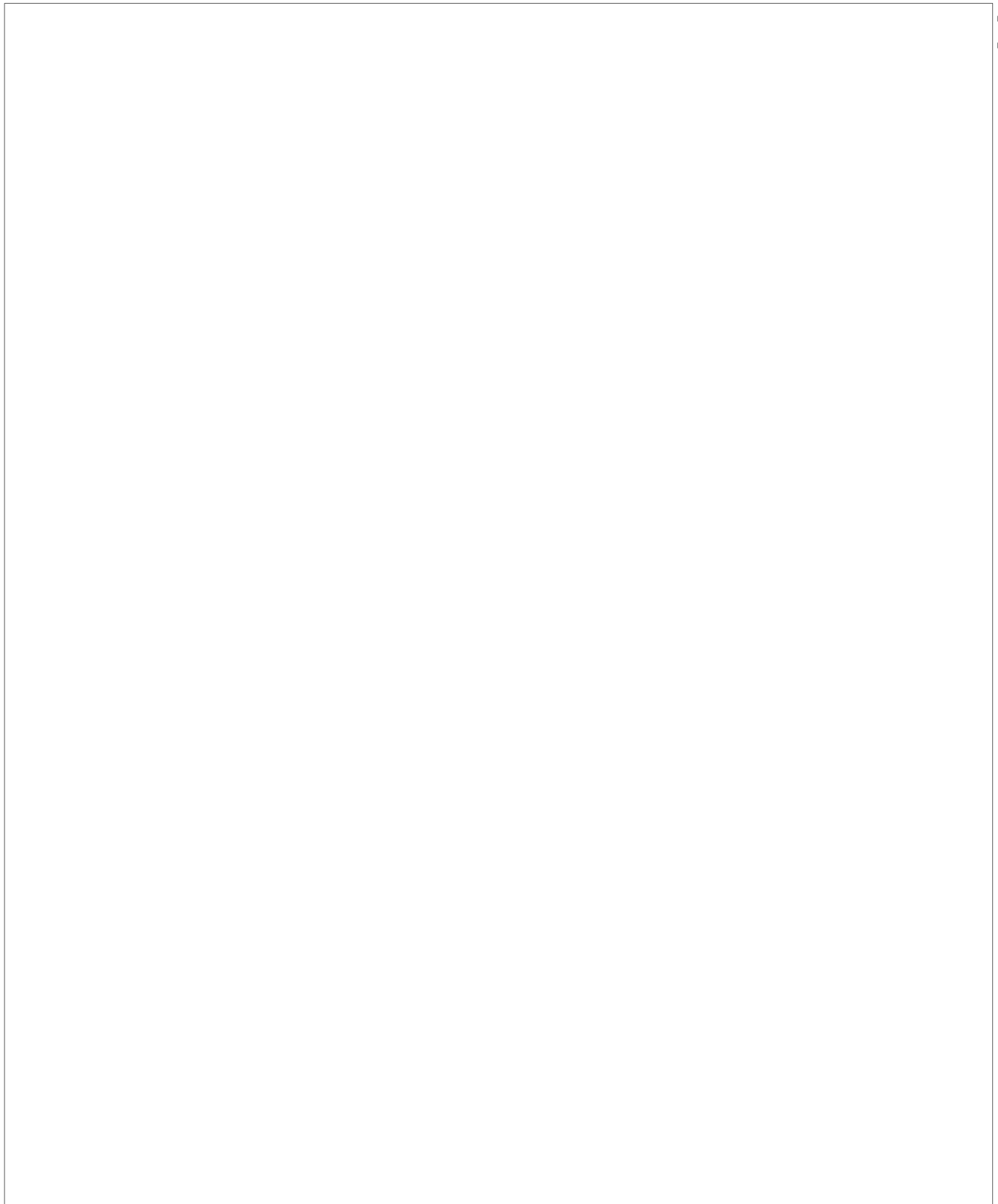
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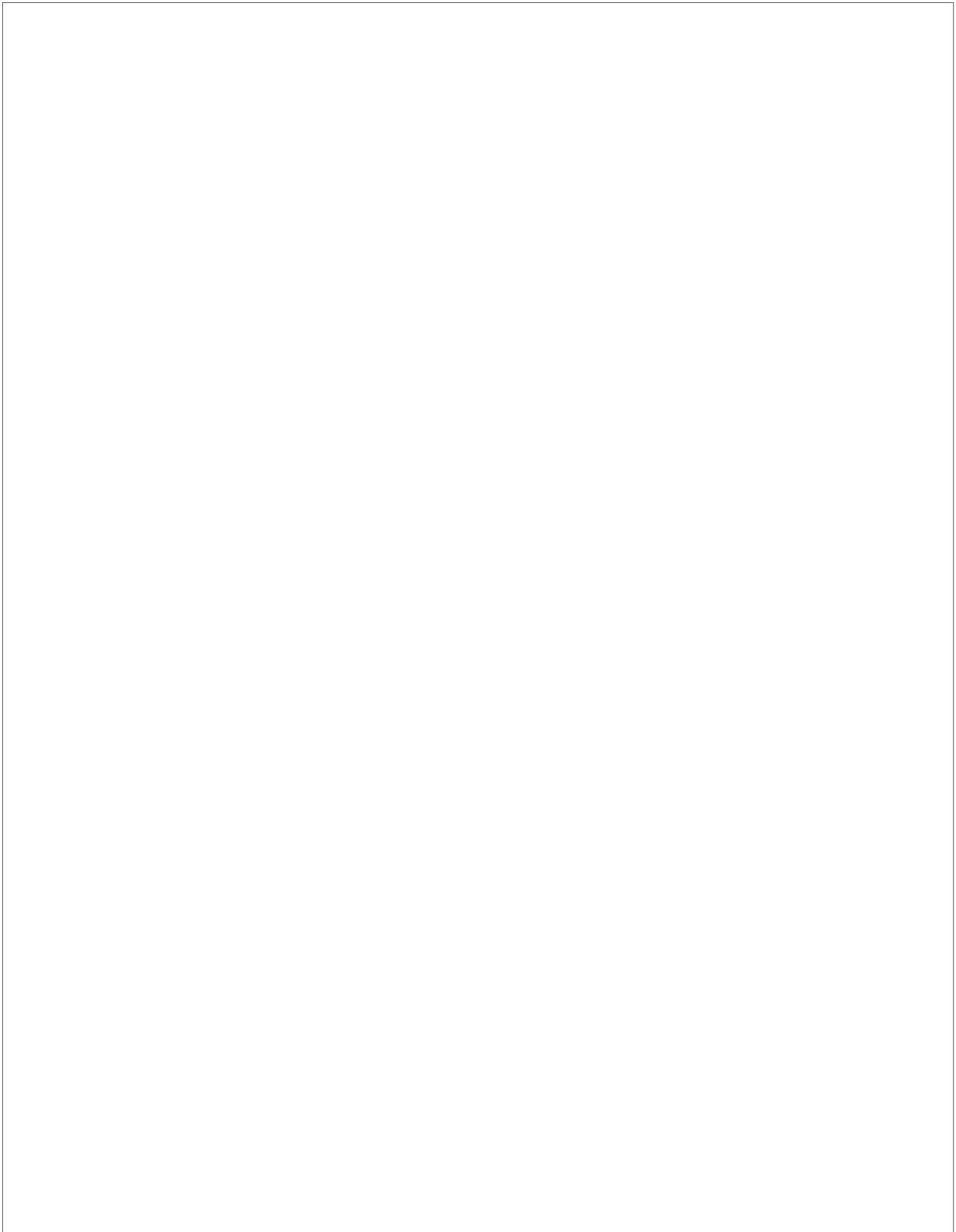
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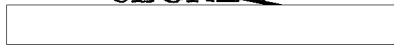
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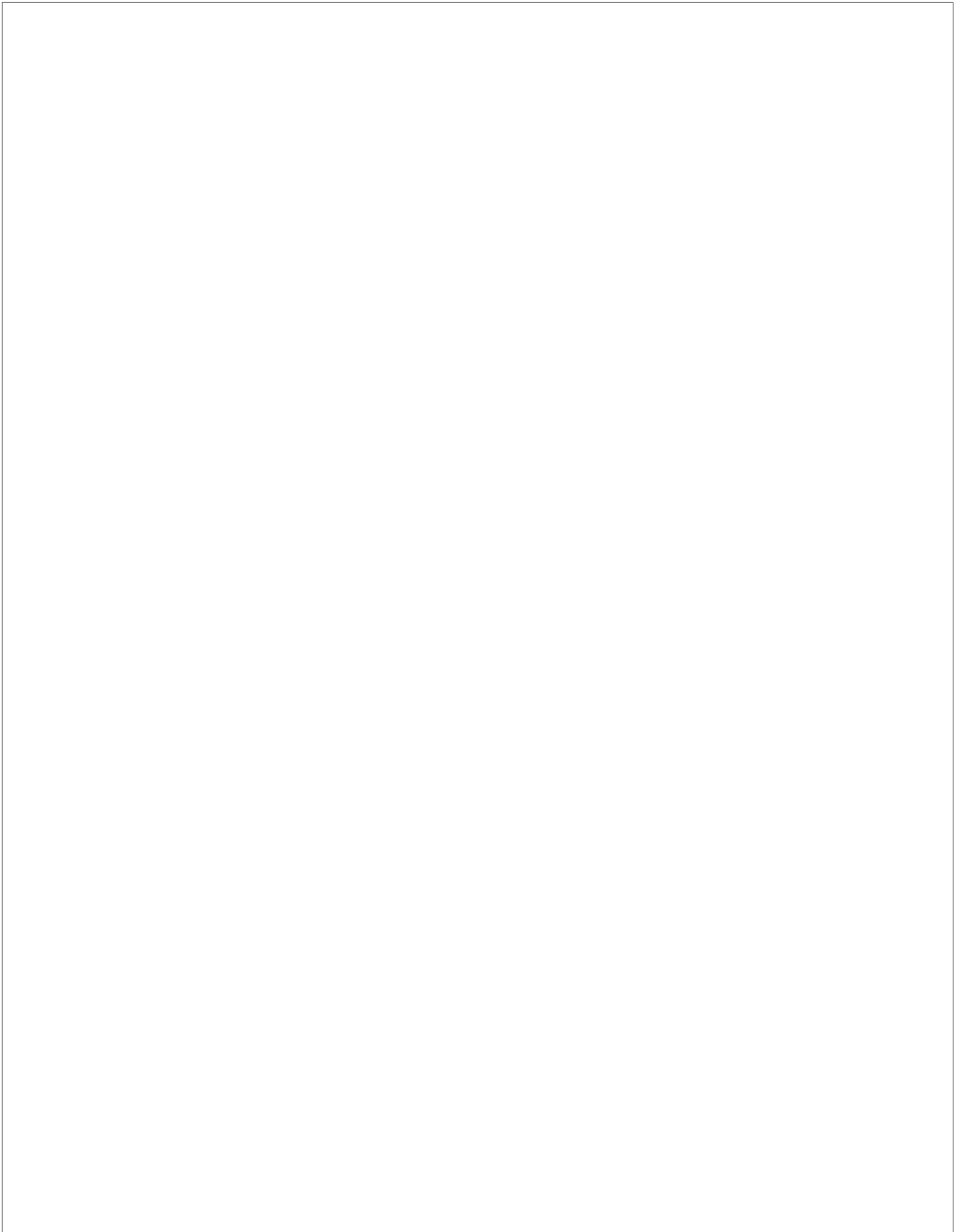
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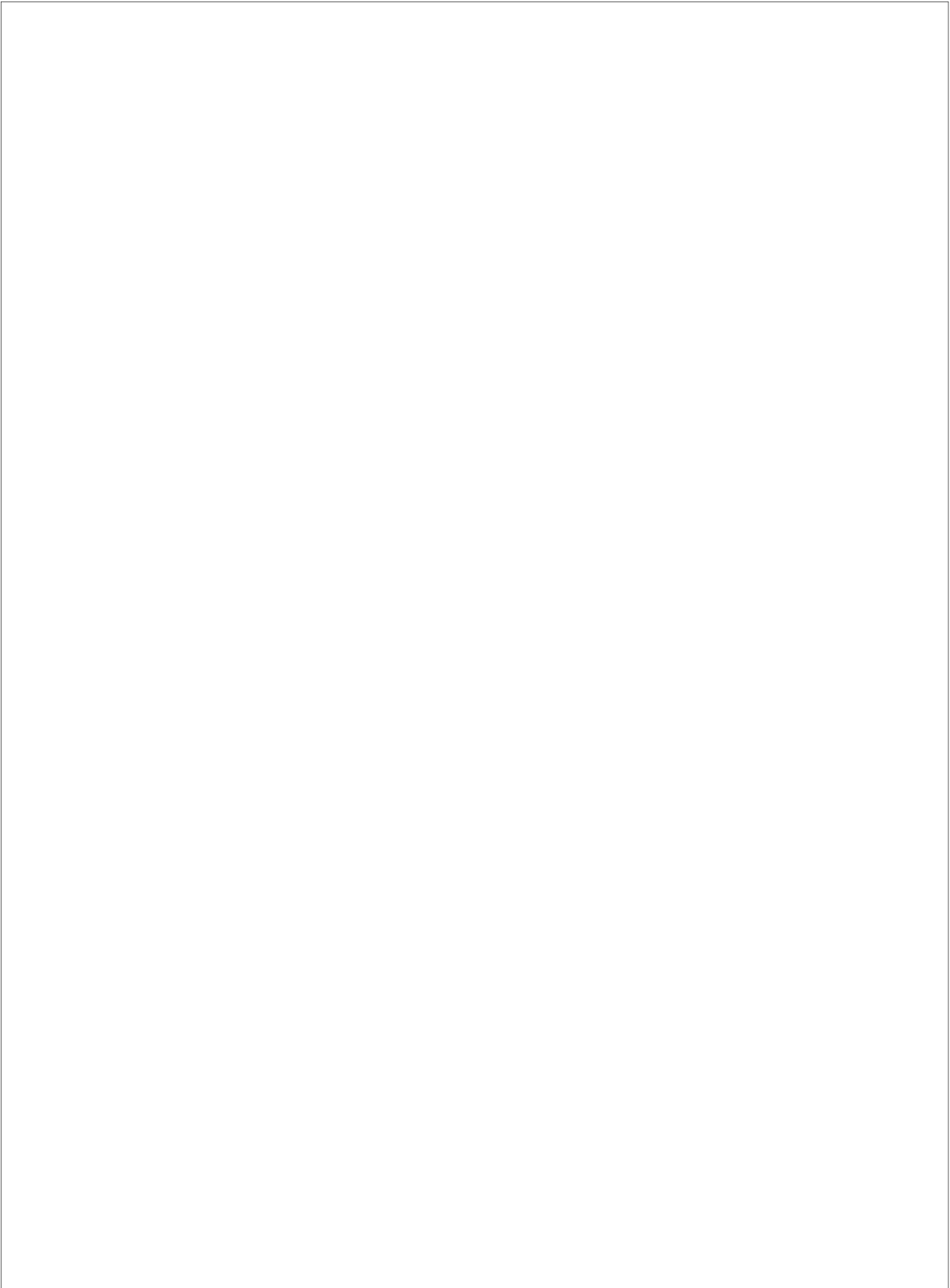
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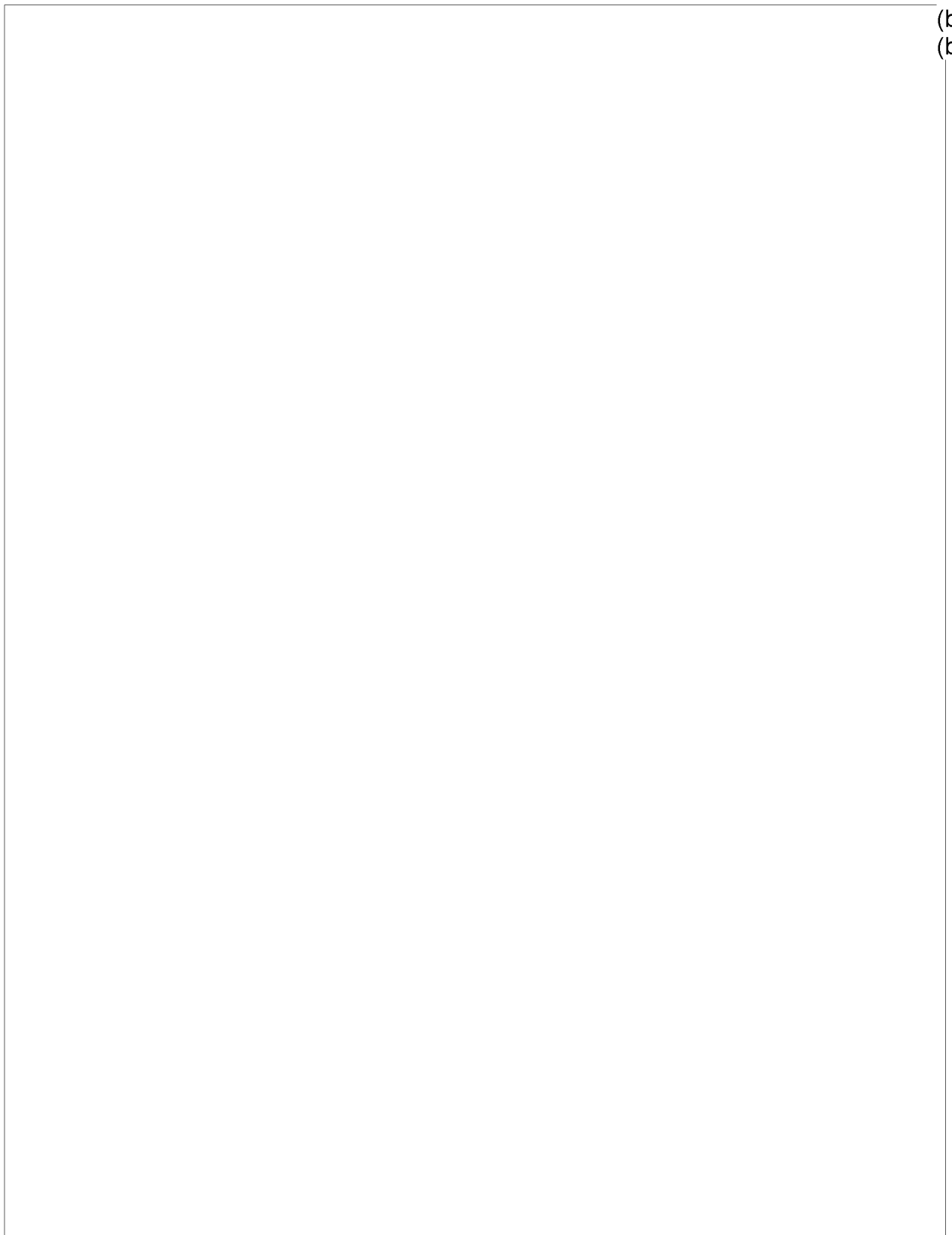
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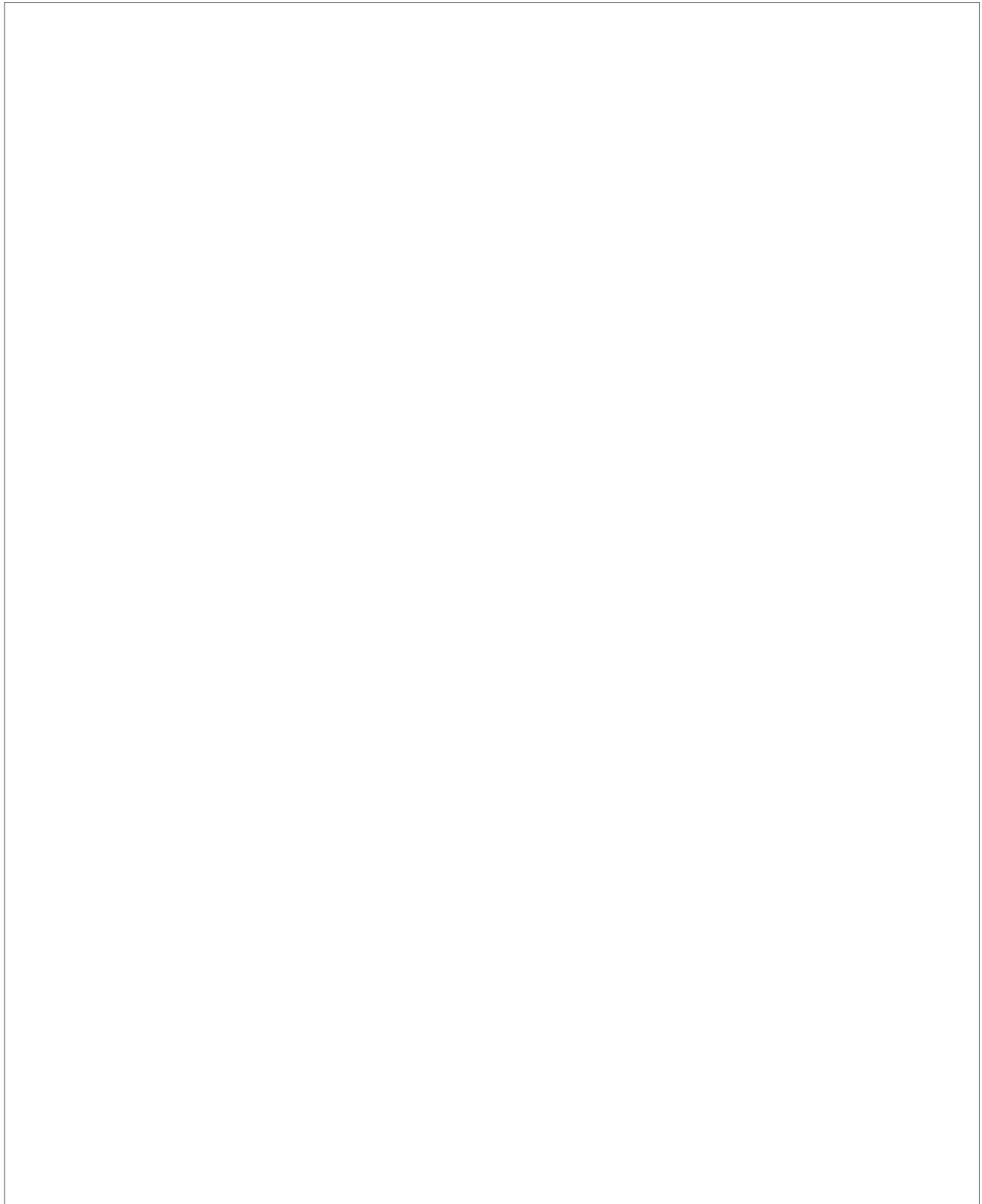
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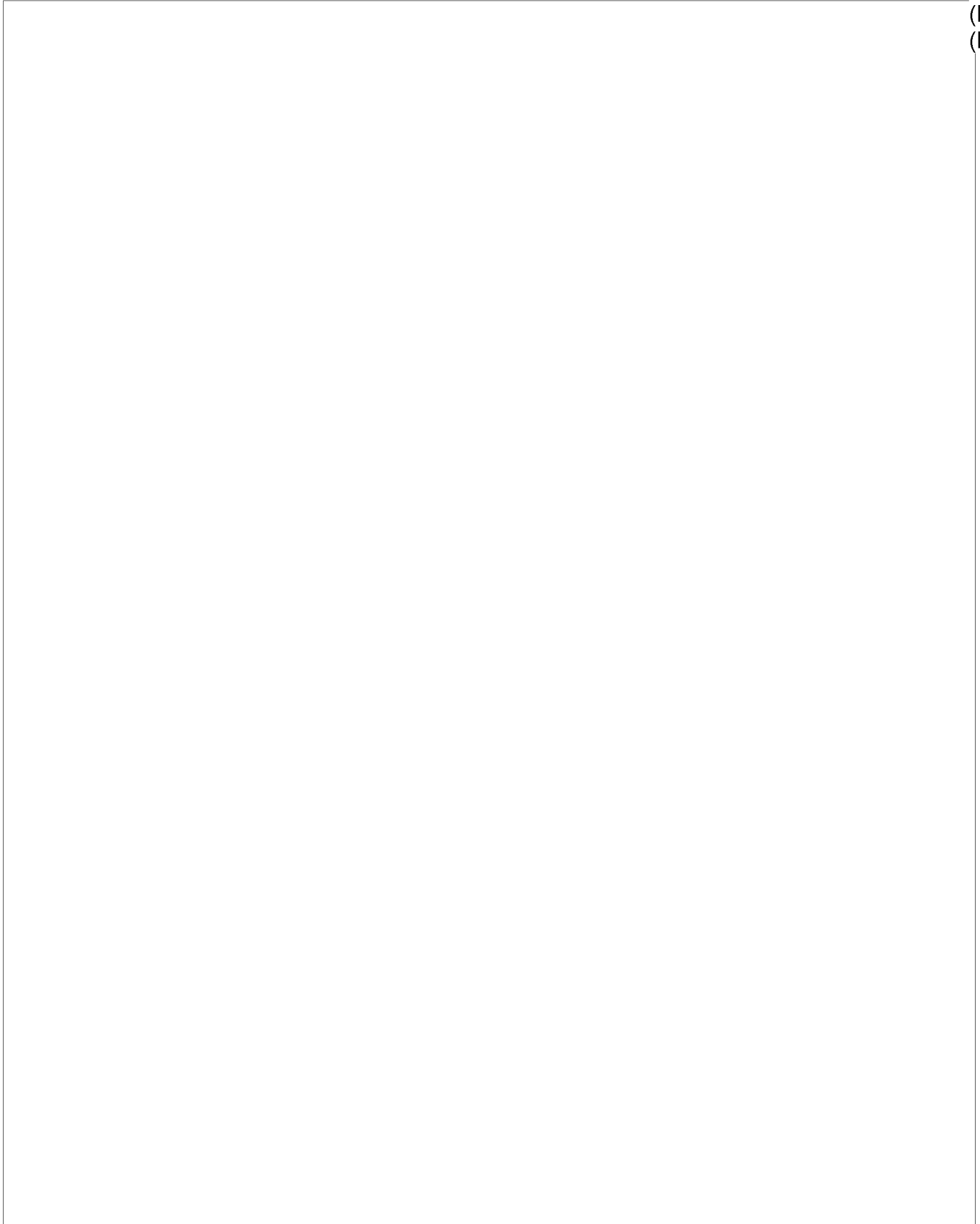
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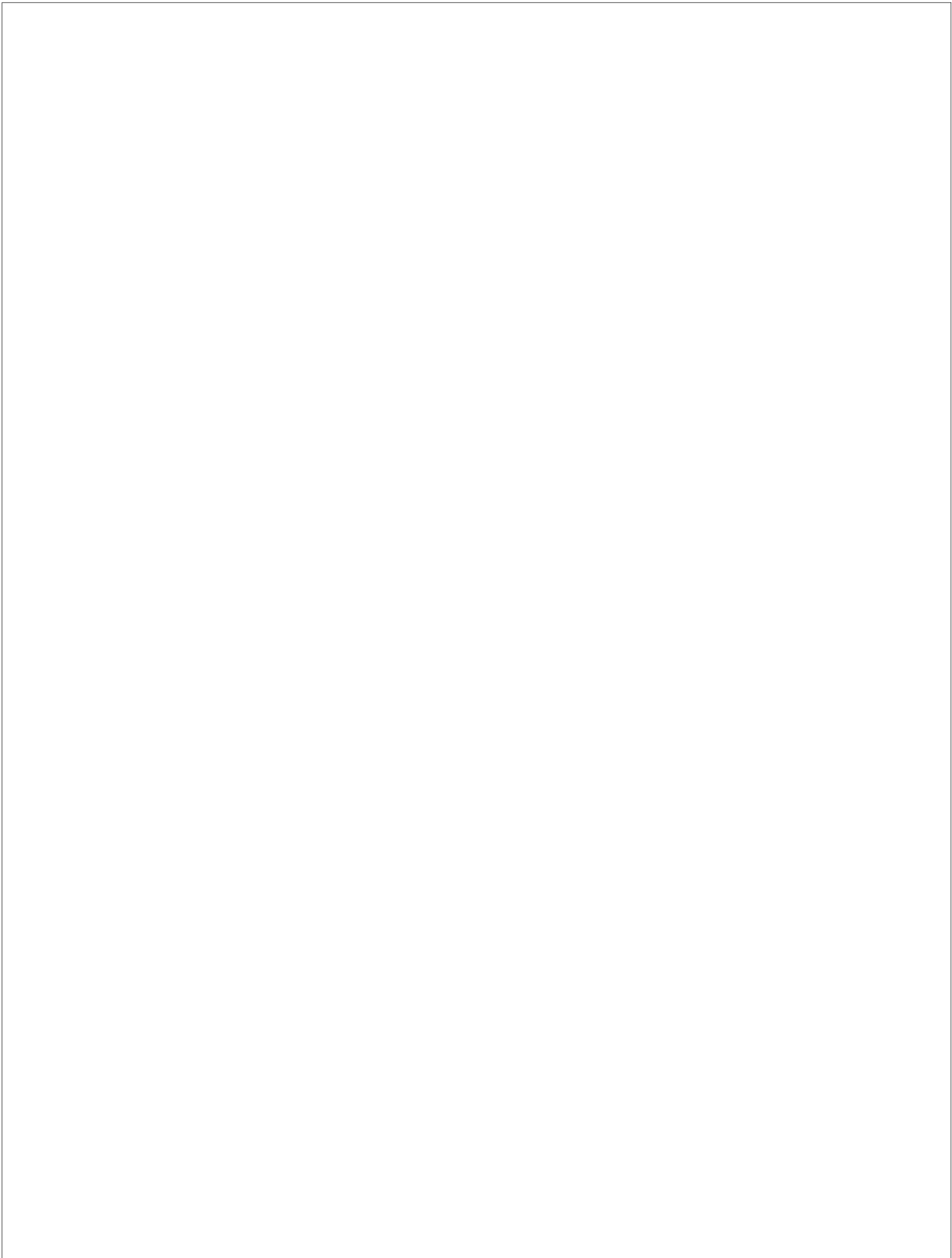
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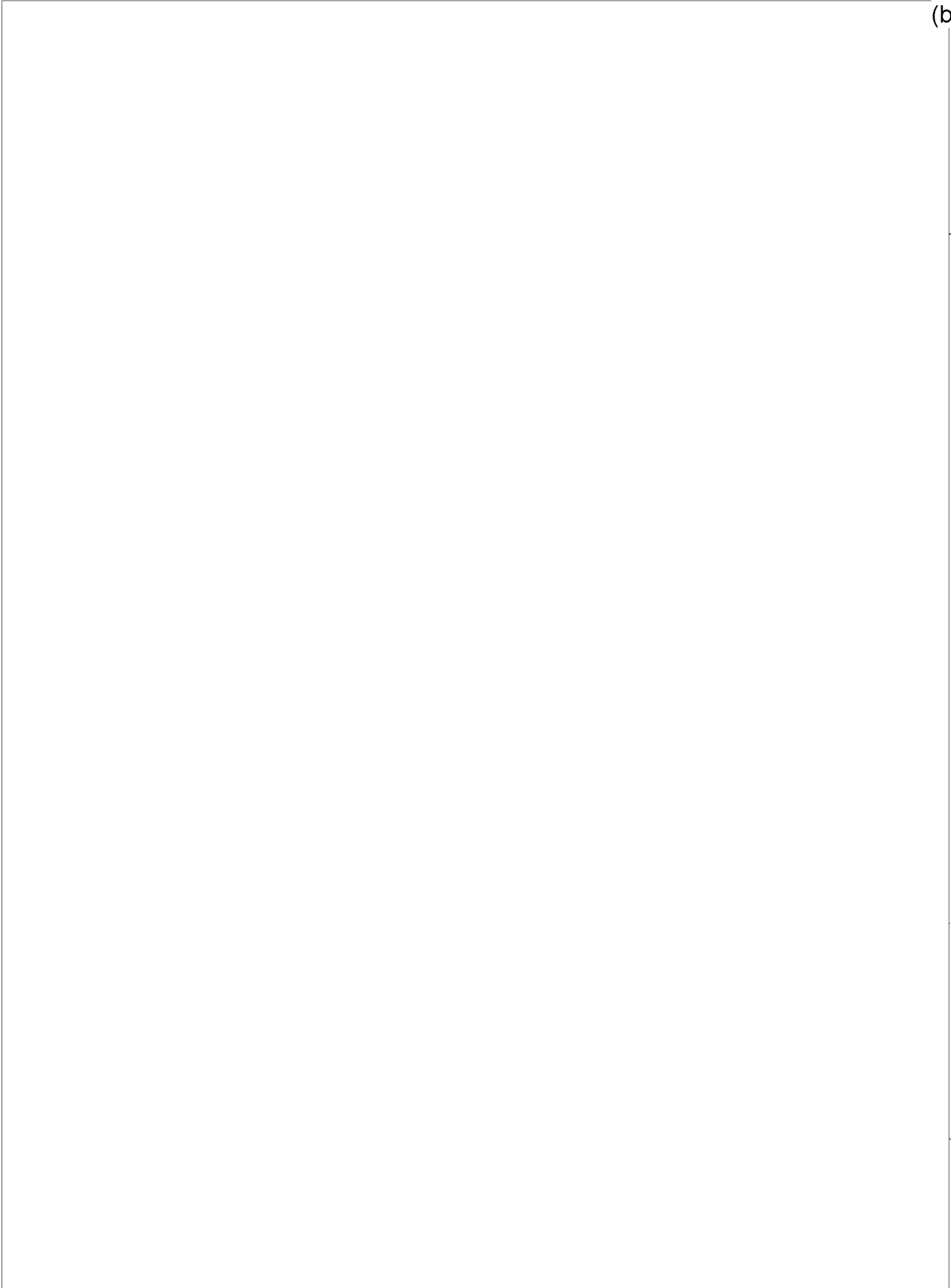
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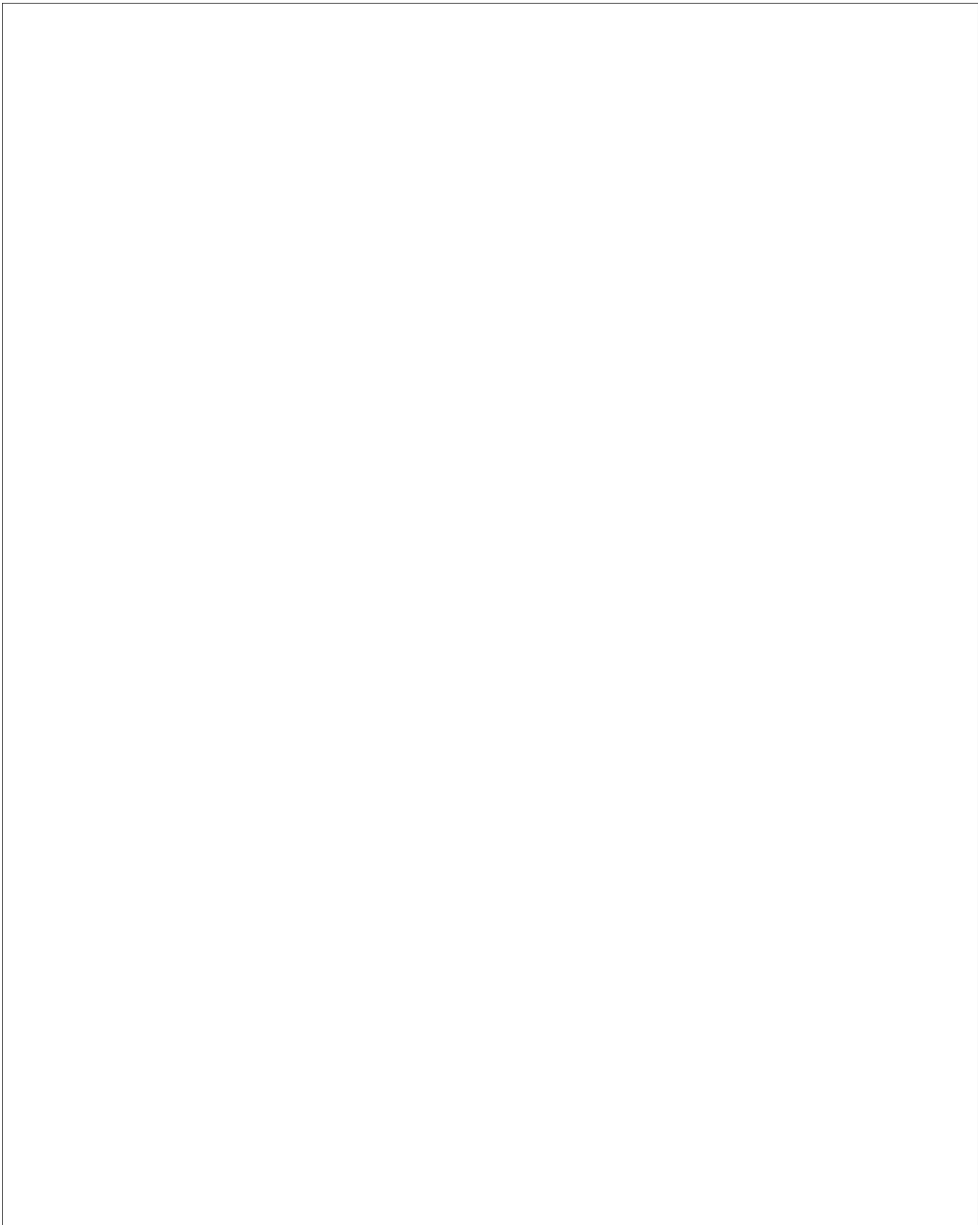
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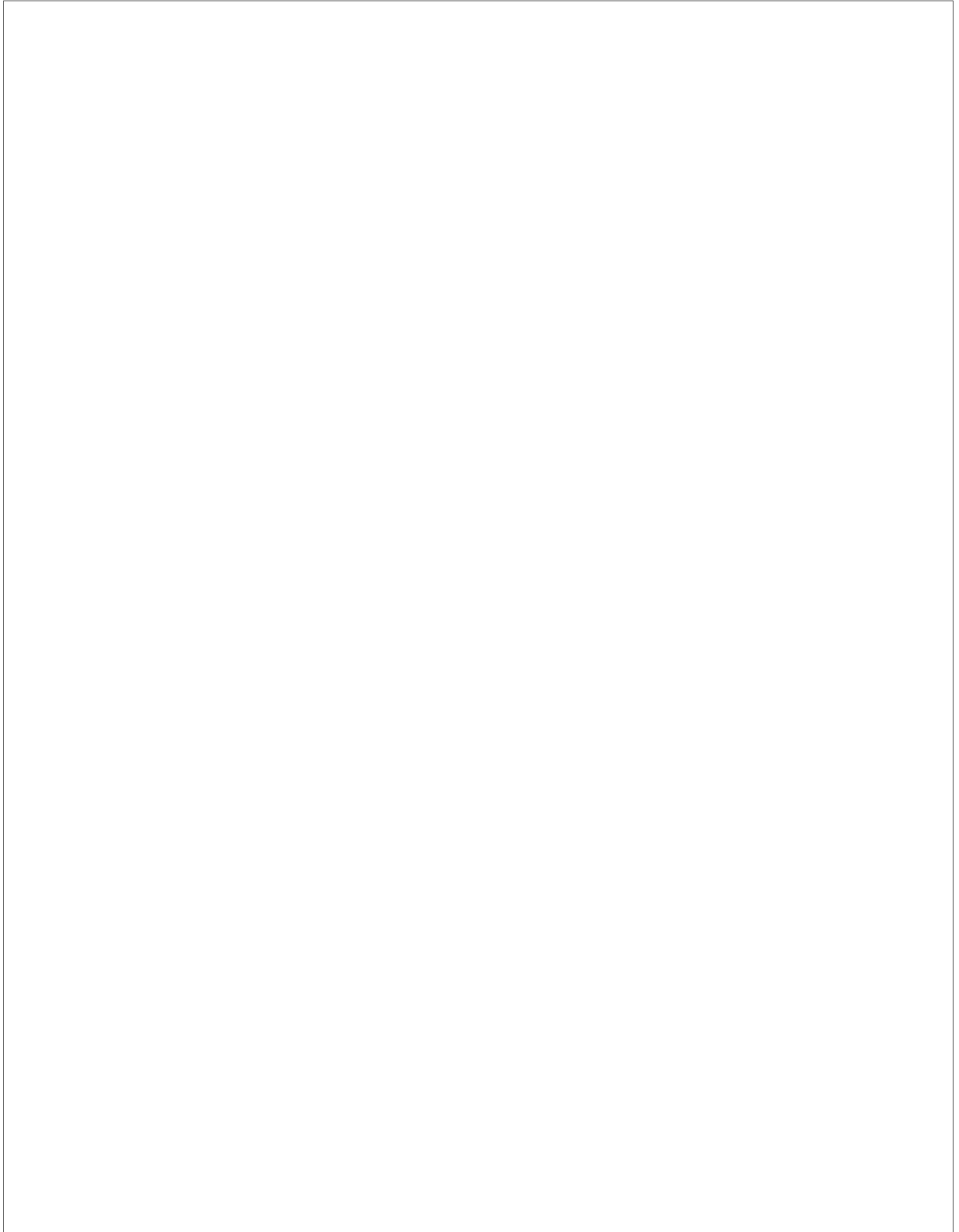
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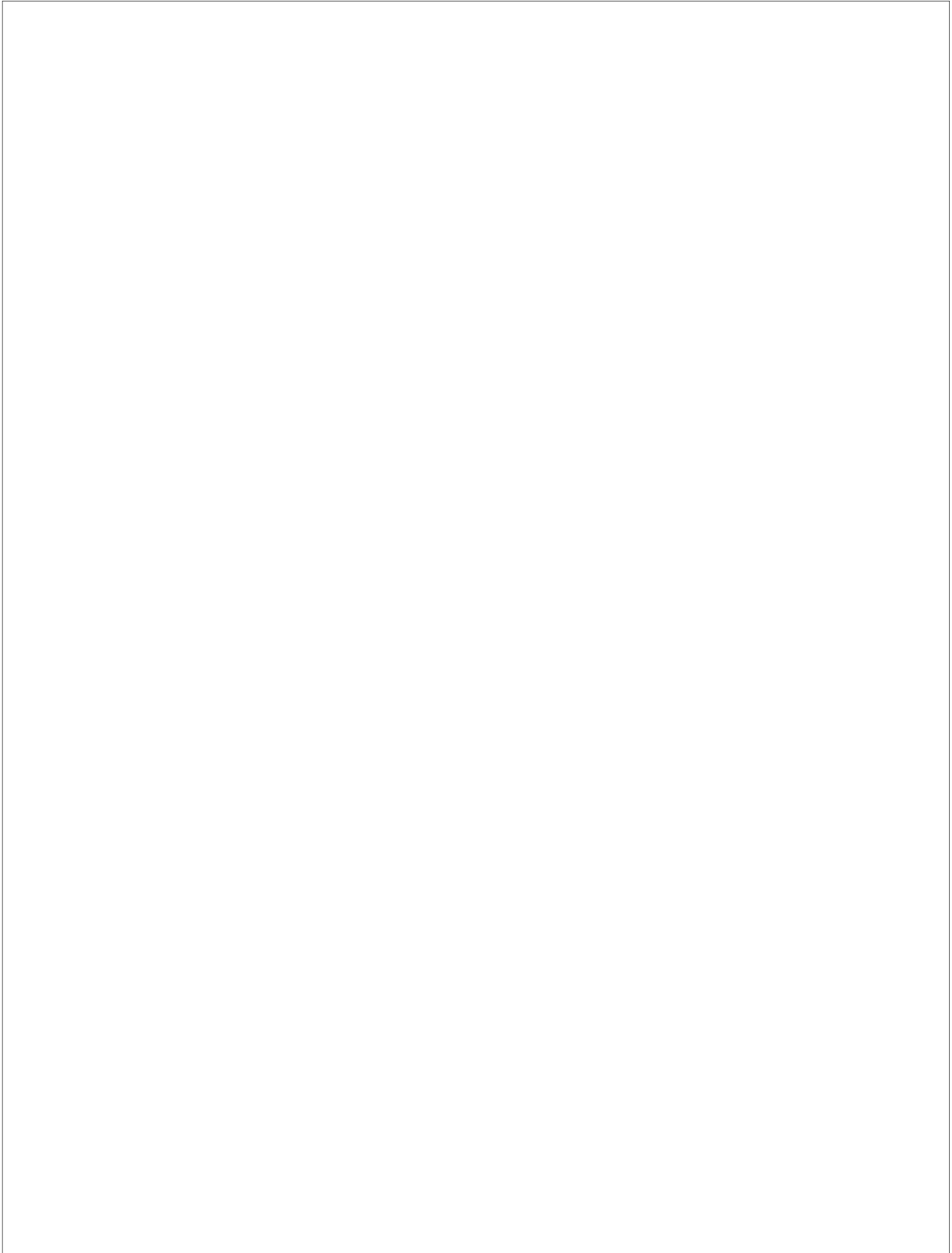
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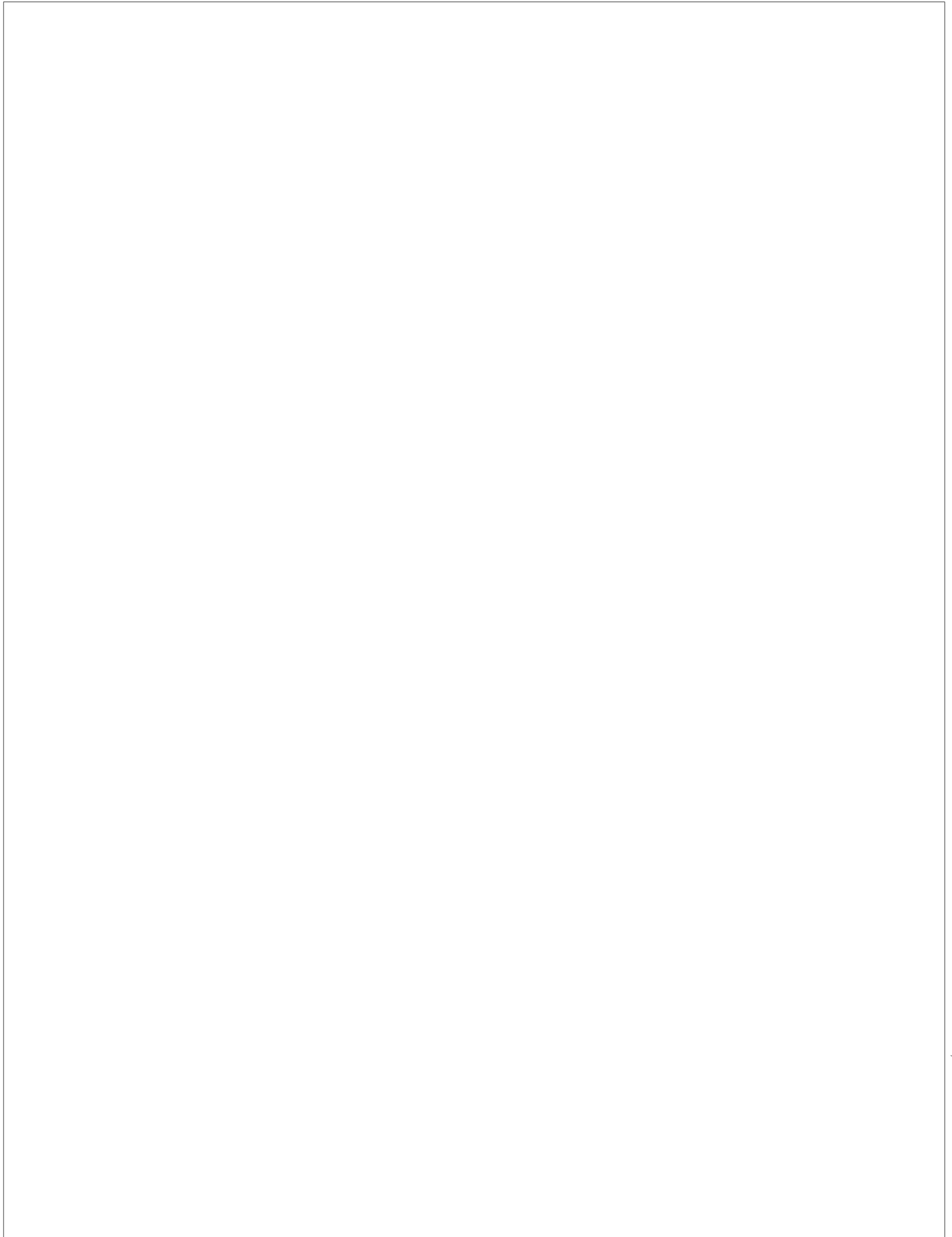
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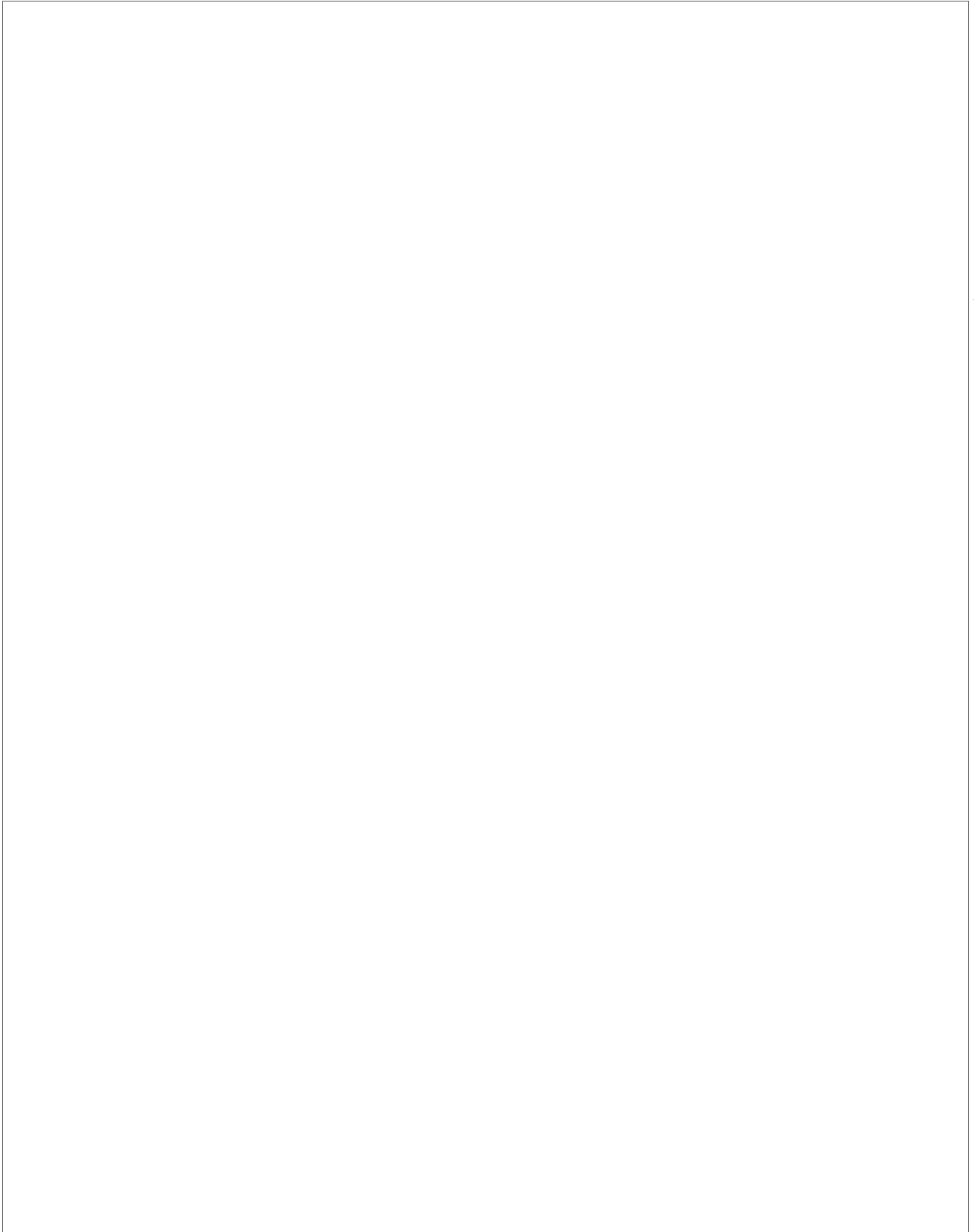
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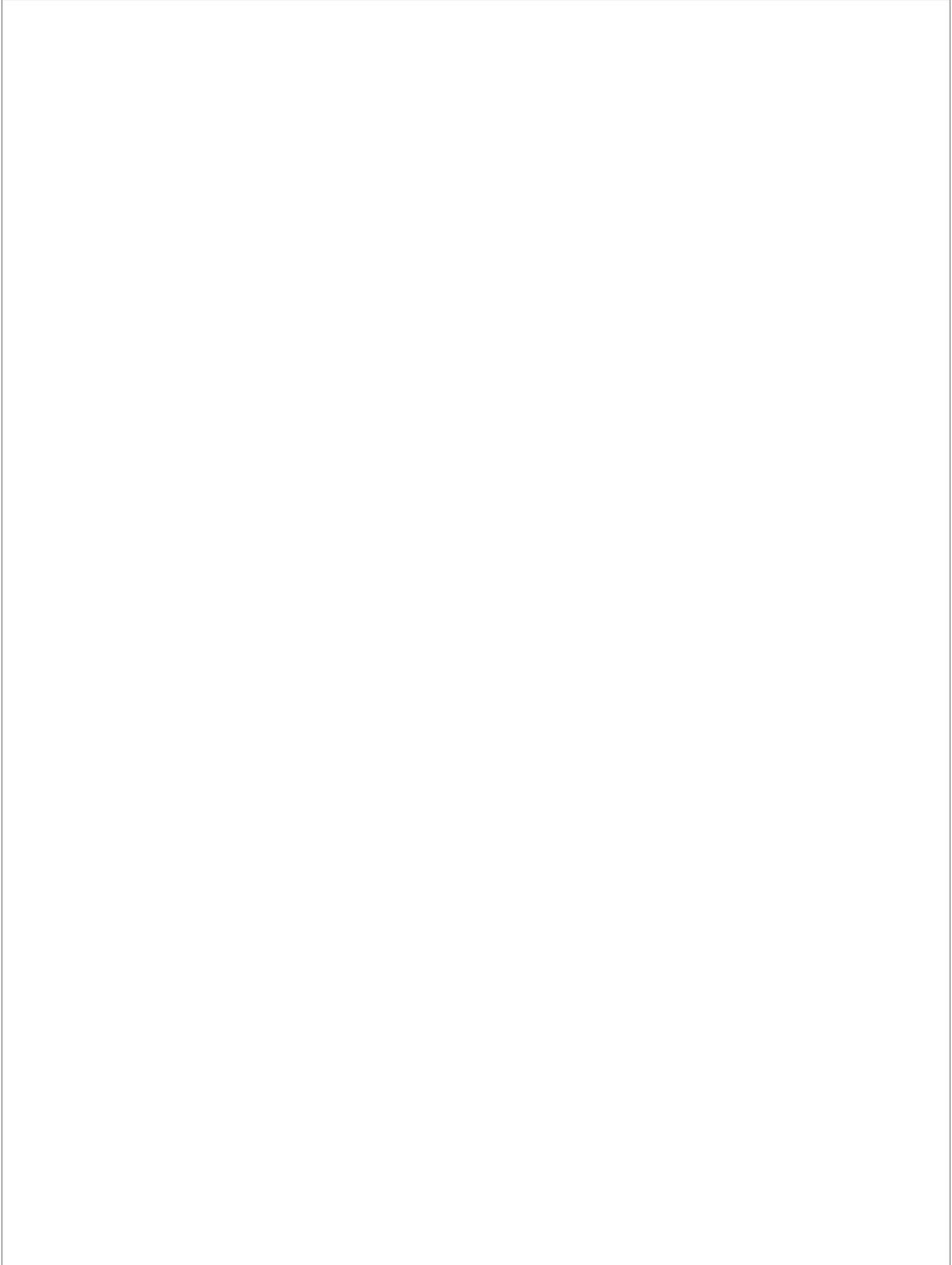
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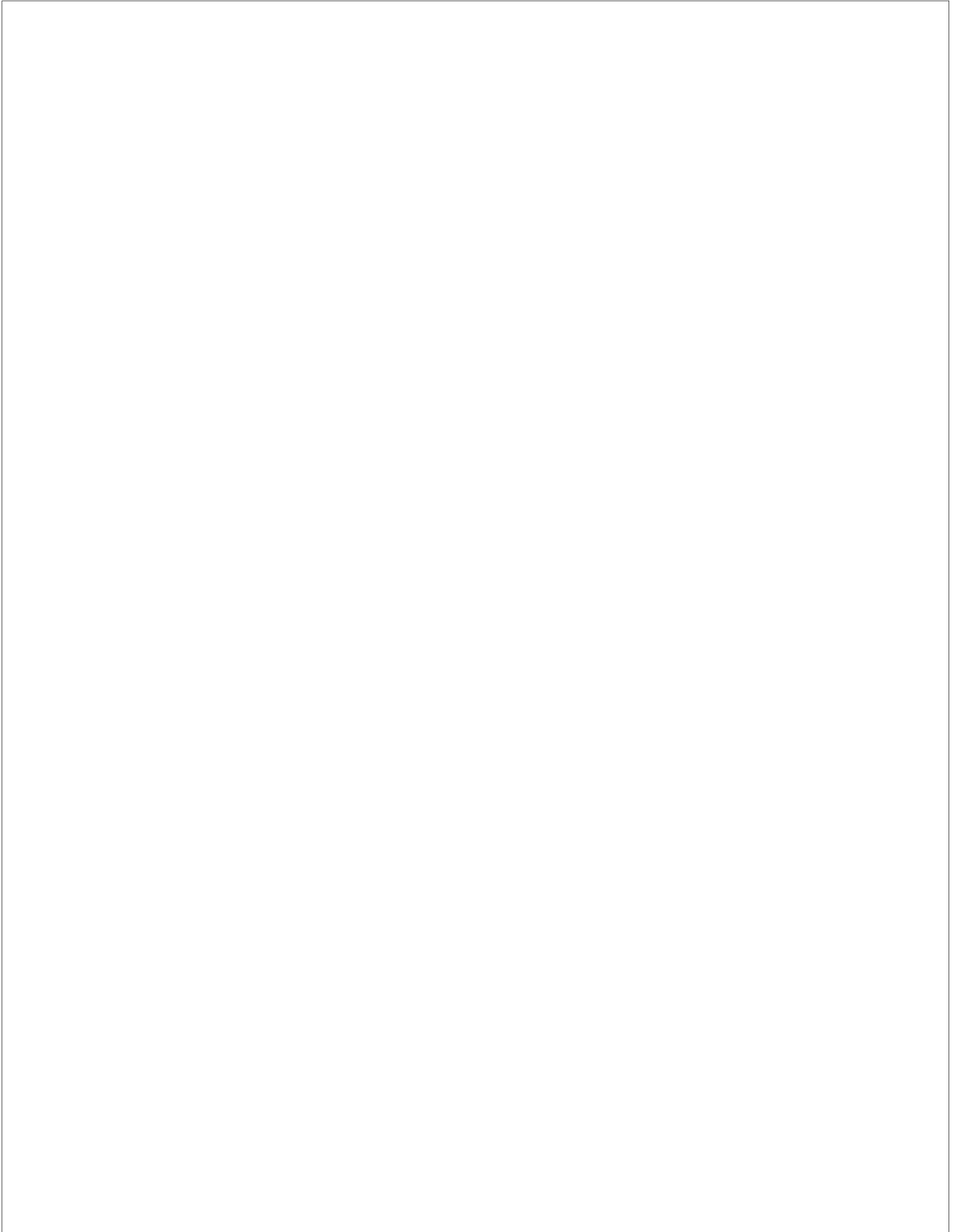
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THE CHURCH IN CUBA

Introduction

No religious group wields significant influence among the Cuban population today. Through a continuing campaign of suppression--sometimes subtle sometimes blatant--the Castro regime has rendered all church-related organizations politically impotent. The Catholic Church, which in Cuba never achieved the position of power it enjoyed in some other Latin American countries, has adopted a policy of accommodation after its futile attempts to counter Cuba's swing to Communism in the early years of the Revolution. Most other churches are following the same path of acquiescence recognizing that an open confrontation with the regime would be courting disaster. Only a very few small sects, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, have openly flouted the Communist government, provoking active persecution in the process. Strong-arm methods of suppression, however, are today applied only to the few militant evangelical proselytizers; such tactics are no longer needed to keep the larger church groups under control. As long as the churches are apolitical and restrict themselves to religious affairs, the Castro regime is satisfied to let them alone, thus "proving" that freedom of religion exists in Cuba.

Cuba has been considered a Catholic country ever since the Spanish cultural influence was introduced in the sixteenth century. Prior to Castro's take-over in 1959, 85 percent of the population was considered at least nominally Roman Catholic. In reality, however, only an estimated 5 to 10 percent could be considered practicing and informed Catholics. Today fewer than one percent of the 8,000,000 Cubans are regular churchgoers. Another one percent is considered the maximum estimate for adherents to all the non-Catholic religious sects. There are also followers of various cults of African origin, but accurate statistics for these groups are not available.

Historical Background

Until the 1950s, Church authorities deliberately avoided party politics and generally abstained from

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endorsing any particular candidates for public office, although they often warned Catholics not to vote for Communist candidates. As opposition to the Batista government increased in the mid-1950s and the retaliatory violence by government forces grew, however, the church was forced more and more into a political role. The radical opposition, which based its appeal for popular support on nationalist ideals, denounced the church--with its predominance of Spanish clergy--as an ally of the government in the service of foreign interests. At the same time, the conservatives, with popular confidence in the Batista regime waning rapidly, looked increasingly to the church for leadership against the "Communist-inspired" radical movement. Thus it was that the church, despite its willingness to accept political and social reforms, found itself in conflict with the new government when Batista fell and Castro assumed power. The strongest supporters of the Catholic Church had come from the middle and upper classes. Thus, the exodus of the privileged class following Castro's accession to power deprived the church of many of its richest and most faithful members. Other factors, such as shortage of clergy, government labor drives, and subtle forms of persecution, further weakened the church.

When the church, alarmed over the extreme policies of the new regime, renewed its denunciation of Communism, government propaganda organs resurrected past histories of alleged ecclesiastical tyranny and indiscriminately labeled Catholics as reactionaries and agents of imperialism and colonialism. As the government gradually assumed control over the means of propaganda dissemination, Catholic radio and television programs were forced off the air and newspapers and periodicals had to stop publication. On 17 July 1960, spontaneous anti-Communist demonstrations by churchgoers caused Castro to lash out publicly against the "counterrevolutionary activities of Falangist priests."

The increasing pressure of political developments induced church leaders to distribute an anti-Communist pastoral letter for reading at all masses on 7 August 1960. Apprised of the letter, the government arranged for mobs of young toughs to invade the churches, disrupt services, shout insults at the churchgoers, and sing revolutionary songs. Stronger action was to follow.

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In early 1961, the regime confiscated all of the church's 250 schools and expelled all but 200 of the church's 700 priests. Most of these were Spanish clerics who never established rapport with the Cuban populace. All but 200 of the more than 3,000 nuns and brothers were also expelled. This effectively eliminated the Catholic Church as a threat to the regime.

In general, the Protestant churches fared better at the hands of the Castro regime. The established groups, such as Episcopalian, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations, have suffered little direct molestation, presumably because they are too small to represent a significant threat. The evangelical sects, however, have borne the brunt of the persecution meted out by the government. Their practice of holding small, semiprivate prayer and religious meetings, often in private homes, arouses great suspicions, and the refusal of some sects to permit their members to perform obligatory military service appears to be particularly irritating to the government.

In March 1963, in the midst of a repressive campaign, Castro heatedly denounced the Gideonites, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Pentecostal Church as "agents of the CIA." In a similar campaign, which lasted from late 1965 to mid-1968, members of various church groups were thrown into military labor camps along with criminals, dope addicts, homosexuals, and other perverts; again, the most severe treatment--which sometimes ended in death--was saved for the militant evangelists. Although the military labor camps were abolished in 1968, the government has continued its pressure by press and radio propaganda.

Spokesmen for the Castro regime have consistently claimed that there is freedom of religion in Cuba. They point to Article 35 of the Fundamental Law of 7 February 1959--currently functioning as Cuba's "constitution"--which "established" freedom of religion. In reality, however, a host of restrictions and government activities provide constant harassment for those who would conscientiously practice their faith. Religious services may not be held outdoors. Supplies and repair parts necessary for the maintenance and upkeep of church buildings are almost impossible to obtain, and certain goods and

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services available to most citizens are withheld from clergymen because they are not considered "productive" members of society. Those who are known to be religious are denied party membership, good jobs, and a university education. Only a limited number of services are permitted in each church each week, and permission must be obtained from the government prior to every service. The importation of such essential religious articles as Bibles is tightly restricted by the government. Sports events and children's games are conducted in the streets in front of churches while services are in progress so that children will be enticed away from the regular practice of their religion and the churchgoers will be distracted by the noise. In addition, the government organizes an annual labor drive that is timed to coincide with Holy Week; those who might wish to mark the end of the Lenten Season in the traditional fashion often find themselves out in the provinces cutting sugarcane.

Although government spokesmen claim that no church property has ever been confiscated by the regime, some missions and church buildings that were unused because of lack of clergymen have been taken over without compensation. In at least one part of Cuba--the Isle of Pines--there are no longer any churches. The island is being turned into a showcase of Cuban Communism where no houses of worship will be needed. Those buildings formerly used for religious services are now functioning as warehouses and storage areas.

The government has made its policy on religion very clear in various public pronouncements. In December 1968, for example, Jose Ramirez, head of the National Association of Small Farmers, bluntly warned those small sects still resisting the military draft: "We are going to struggle against those who preach the Bible and use it to keep the peasant from joining in the defense of his country and to keep his children from pledging allegiance to the flag." Ramirez also had a word of caution for those who advised against the government's educational scholarship plan: "We propose to advance an ideological struggle with the religious sects who are going to the countryside to confuse the peasant, making him believe that his children's remoteness (while away at boarding school) will separate the family completely."

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More recently, in a diatribe aimed at the Jehovah's Witnesses in particular but published for the public in general, the armed forces weekly magazine stated: "Religion is, par excellence, the most conservative and backward form of ideology. It is born of fear, impotence, and ignorance. It is based on blind faith in the supernatural, in the absurd, in the antiscientific. It interprets natural and social phenomena as well as events affecting people in a fantastic and perverted manner.... Religious beliefs--and the institutions created for their sustenance and dissemination, churches, clergy, pastors, societies, etc.--have always been used by the exploiters in order to maintain their privilege and rule, in order to put the oppressed to sleep and to confuse and disarm them. They also use these beliefs and institutions to regain positions which they have definitively lost, in an effort to disorganize, divide, weaken, or crush the popular forces or in an effort to stunt the growth of the 'new man,' the man who is man's brother, free from superstition and prejudice, from harmful ambitions and anti-social egotism."

Now that no religious groups constitute a threat to the regime, however, the government is quite willing to let them exist within certain carefully defined limits, confident that eventually they will wither and die.

The Roman Catholic Church Structure

Cuba is divided ecclesiastically into the western archdiocese of Havana, with the subordinate dioceses of Pinar del Rio and Matanzas; and the eastern archdiocese of Santiago de Cuba, with the subordinate dioceses of Camaguey and Cienfuegos. There are now only about 210 priests and an equal number of nuns to care for approximately 1,000 churches still in operation. This would mean one priest for roughly every 35,000 nominal Catholics if the same proportion of Cubans professed the faith now as did in 1959. Half of the priests are Cuban born; of the remainder the majority are Spanish, one fifth are Canadians, and the rest are other Europeans. About 100 priests are located in Havana Province, with all but 15 stationed in the city of Havana. Only two seminaries are still operating: San Carlos in Havana with about 60 seminarians, and San Basilio in Santiago de Cuba with 20

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in the pre-seminary course. The Buen Pastor Seminary in Havana was closed in 1966.

The key members of the hierarchy in Cuba are:

Evelio Diaz, Archbishop of Havana
Jose M. Dominguez, Bishop of Matanzas
Manuel A. Rodriguez Rozas, Bishop of Pinar del Rio
Fernando Ascarate, Auxiliary Bishop of Havana
Pedro Maurice Estin, Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago de Cuba
Adolfo Rodriguez Herrera, Bishop of Camaguey
Alfredo Muller, Bishop of Cienfuegos
Alfredo Llaguno, Auxiliary Bishop of Havana

There are 226 parishes in Cuba divided among the dioceses as follows: Pinar del Rio - 27; Havana - 66; Matanzas - 31; Cienfuegos - 51; Camaguey - 17; and Santiago de Cuba - 34.

The Catholic Church is no longer involved in education, having been divested of all its schools in 1961. Its main problem today is the shortage of priests. If the remaining foreign priests are expelled, the native clergy will be even less able to meet the needs of their congregations. Even now many areas are without resident clergy; religious services are held only when visiting priests, traveling on bicycles, horses, motorcycles, or any other mode of transportation, can make their rounds.

Recent Trends

Following the confiscation of its schools and the expulsion of its priests, nuns, and brothers, the Catholic Church went through a period of withdrawal, avoiding open conflict with the government. Recent statements by church leaders suggest, however, that this period is over and a new policy of accommodation has emerged. One Havana priest, for example, has been quoted as saying: "Until a short time ago, Christianity and Marxism were two hermetically sealed blocs filled with mutual distrust and between whom dialogue was impossible. Today new horizons are opening. Groups of Marxists and Christians, liberated from irreconcilable dogmatisms, view each other with respect

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and not as enemies. Furthermore, Marxism is a philosophy and a political system, and Christianity is a religion. To avoid contradictions of a practical nature, antagonistic attitudes must be overcome. This means, on the part of the Catholics, not to compete in the political field by creating institutions with religious labels, such as Christian trade unionism, Christian political parties, etc. To say that socialism is not the ideal political regime now in our countries (ie: Latin America) would be to go against the feeling of all peoples who are seeking their liberation."

The most significant recent pronouncement by the church was contained in its first pastoral letter since that of 1960 in which Communism was denounced. The letter, issued to priests for reading at all masses on 20 April 1969, was signed by the eight leaders who constitute the Cuban Catholic Church hierarchy and called for an end to the US economic blockade of Cuba. It also exhorted Catholics not to leave Cuba and called for full cooperation in the construction of a new society in Cuba. Although a few priests were so incensed at the obvious about-face that they refused to read the letter to their congregations, it apparently sets the tone for church-state relations in the immediate future.

Credit for the letter and for much of the "new look" of the church in Cuba must go to the Vatican's charge d'affaires ad interim in Havana, Monsignor Cesare Zacchi. He accompanied a Cuban delegation to last year's CELAM conference in Bogota. Zacchi, who has represented the Vatican in Cuba since 1962, has worked hard to improve relations with the Castro regime and apparently has developed an excellent personal relationship with Castro himself. In an unprecedented move, for example, the Cuban premier visited the Vatican embassy in December 1967 to attend a reception honoring Zacchi's consecration as Bishop of Zelli. Castro reportedly spent almost three hours in a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere with Zacchi and other church leaders.

Protestantism

The major Protestant groups in Cuba today are the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians,

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and several evangelical sects. The Baptists, divided into four main groups (Eastern, Western, Southern, and Free-Will), are probably the most vigorous denomination in Cuba today. One chagrined Communist Party official recently complained that "when you step on a Baptist, two more pop up to take his place." Numbering between 12,000 and 14,000, the Baptists are served by 120 churches and 100 ministers. They are currently training some 60 seminary students, more than enough to meet domestic needs.

Like the Baptists, the Methodists, numbering about 10,000, are fairly active in all provinces of Cuba. They have about 115 churches and more than 40 full-time pastors supported by a number of lay leaders who also work actively in the churches. Unlike the Baptist Church, however, the Methodist Church in financial terms has not yet emerged from its mission status. Although contributions from the membership have been increasing, the church is not expected to be self-supporting for four or five years. The Reverend Armando Rodriguez has been serving as the Bishop of the Church since February 1968 when it broke its ties with the US and became an independent and autonomous church, adopting the title of Methodist Church of Cuba. It still depends, as do other Protestant churches, on funds from the World Council of Churches.

The Episcopal Church has 53 churches and about 5,000 members. Both membership and clergy have dwindled since 1959 and there are now only 15 ministers serving the community. Only two or three students are studying for the ministry. None of the 53 churches is self-supporting, and the future for Episcopalianism in Cuba is not promising.

Membership in the Presbyterian Church has also declined since 1959 and now is about 5,000. There are 32 churches served by 17 ministers; only two theological students are now studying for the ministry. Because of the onus placed by the regime on religious groups with foreign affiliations, the Presbyterian Church in early 1967 declared itself independent of the mother church in the United States and adopted the title of Reformed Presbyterian Church of Cuba. The Reverend Francisco Norniella, a pastor from Cardenas in Matanzas Province, is currently the

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president of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Reverend Sergio Arce Martinez is its secretary general.

Jehovah's Witnesses probably number about 10,000, but accurate statistics on churches and clergy are not available. Like other sects active in proselytizing, the Witnesses have been subjected to harsh repression--an environment in which they seem to thrive and multiply. Figures on other sects, such as the Pentecostal Church, Russian Orthodox Church, Nazarenes, Adventists, Salvation Army, Liberal Catholics, Gideonites, and others, are also unavailable but all are believed to have very small followings and relatively few clergy.

Jews

There are four or five synagogues, all in the Havana area, serving Cuba's 2,000 Jews but there are no rabbis. Emigration to the United States and to Israel is rapidly reducing this religious group.

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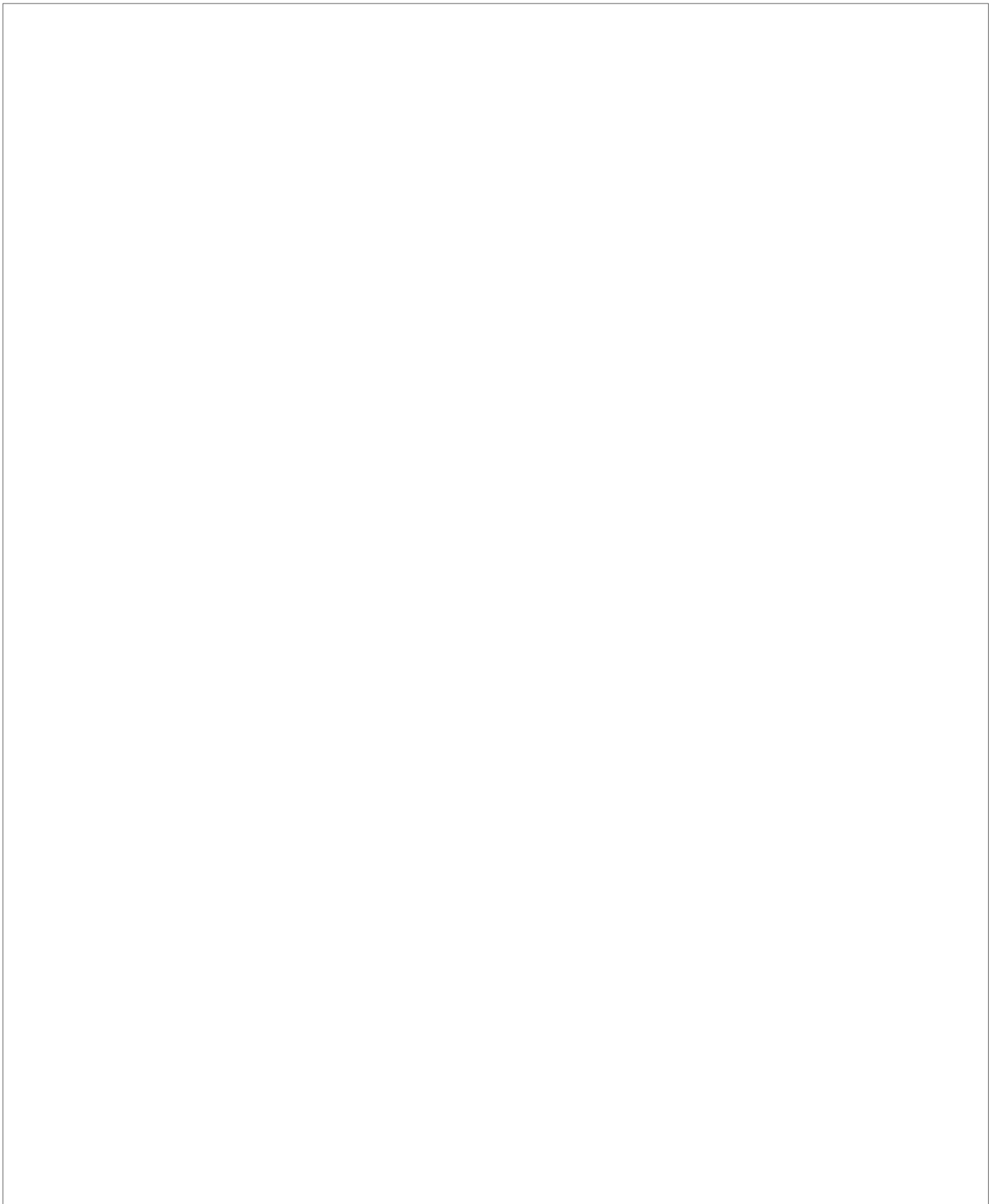
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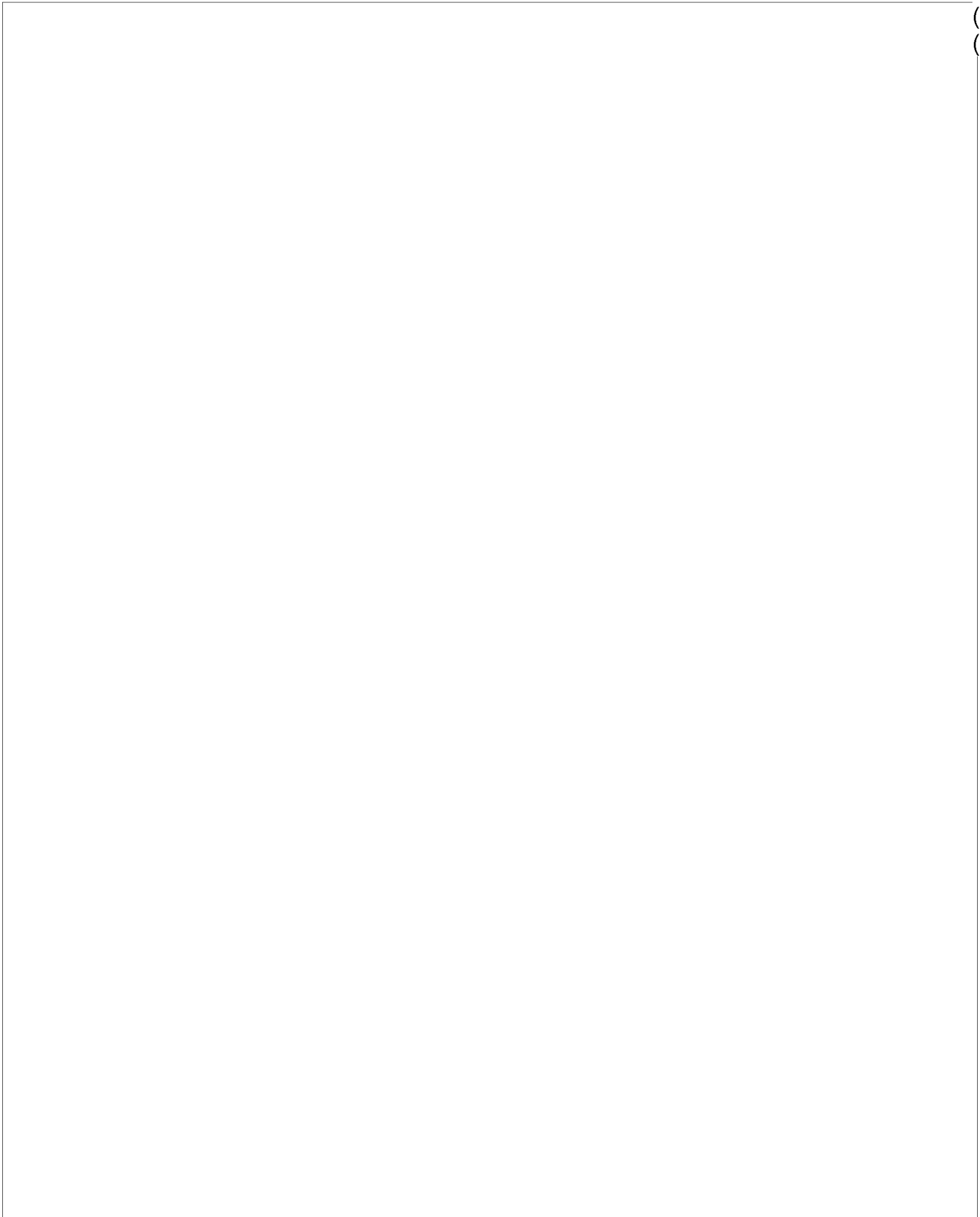
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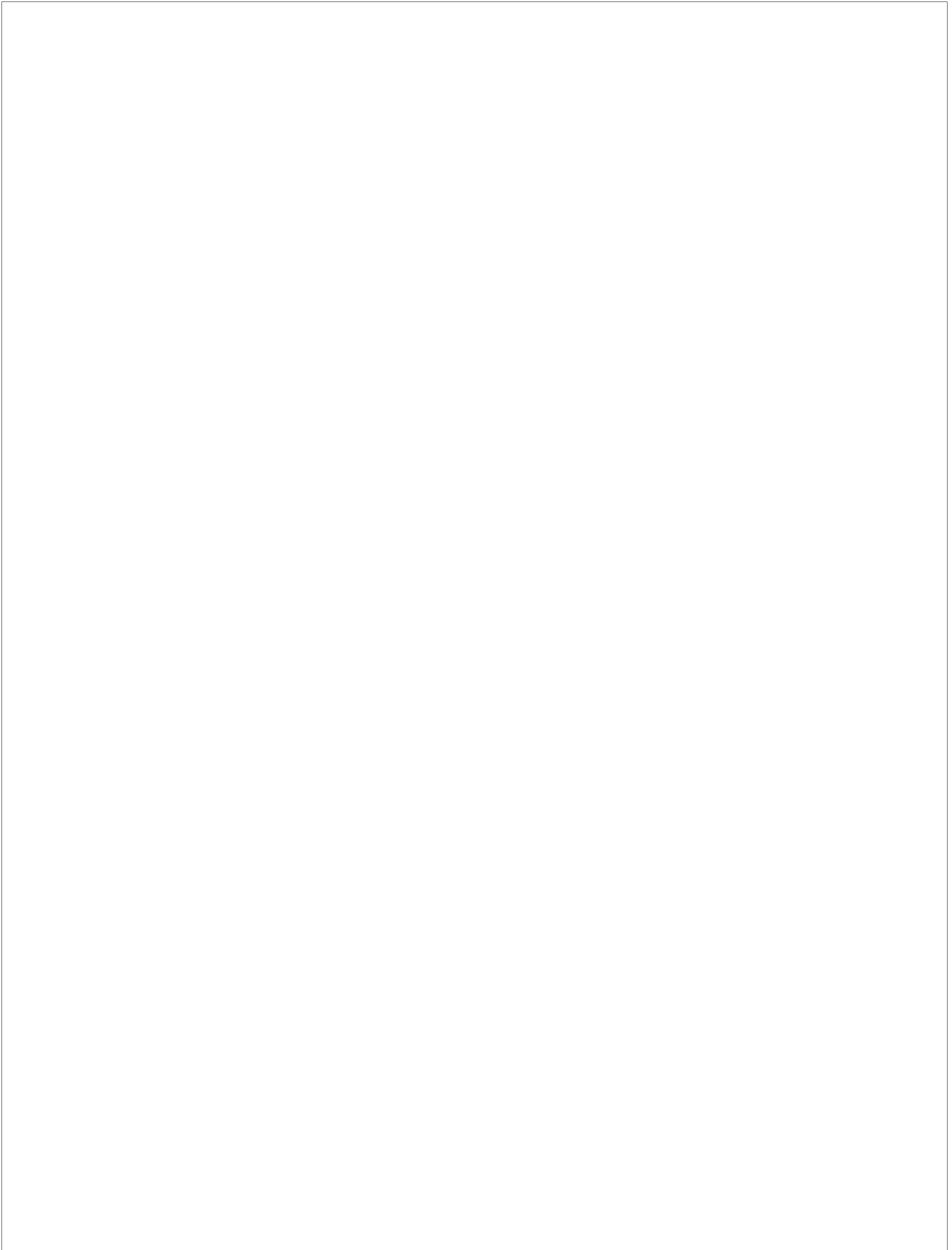


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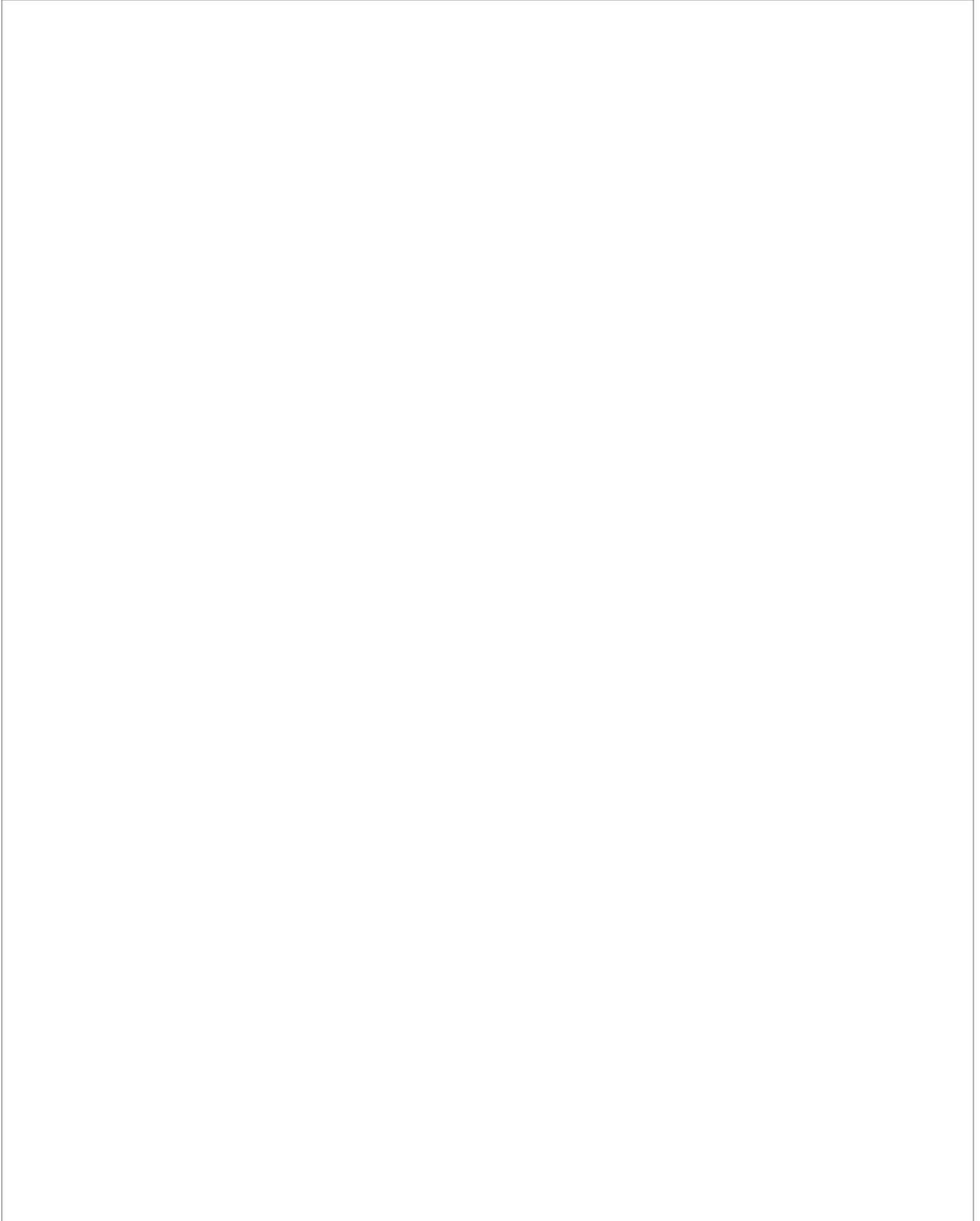
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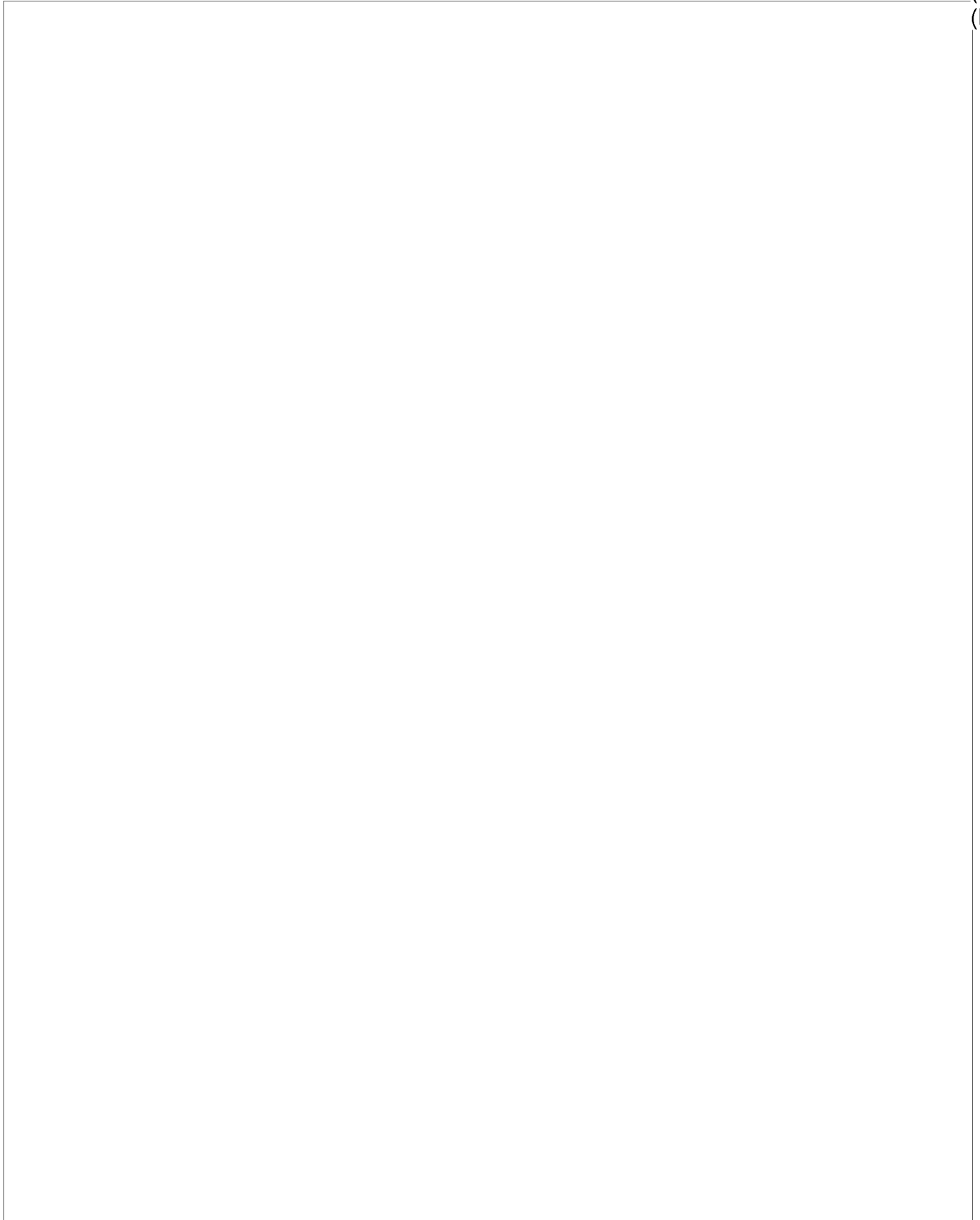
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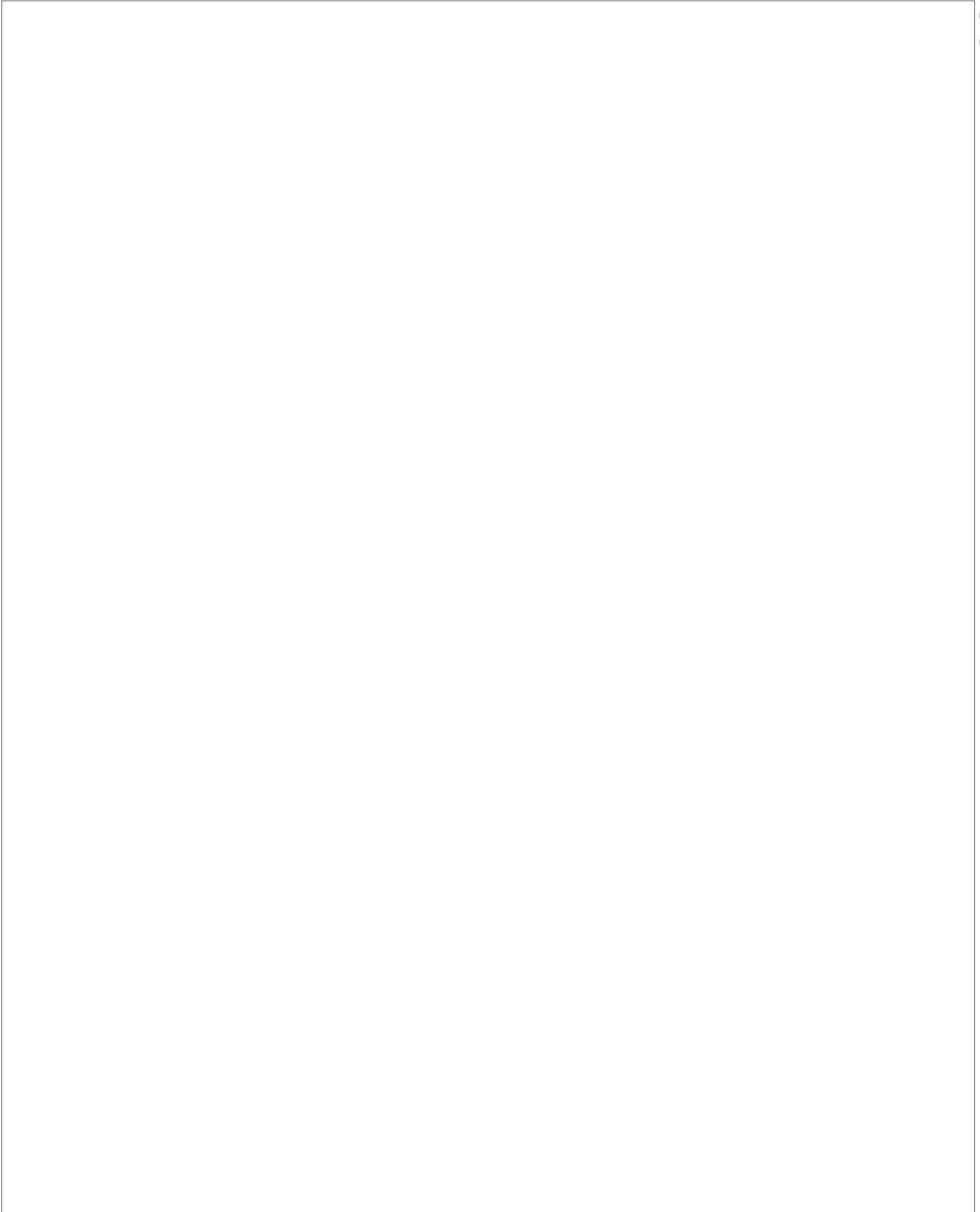
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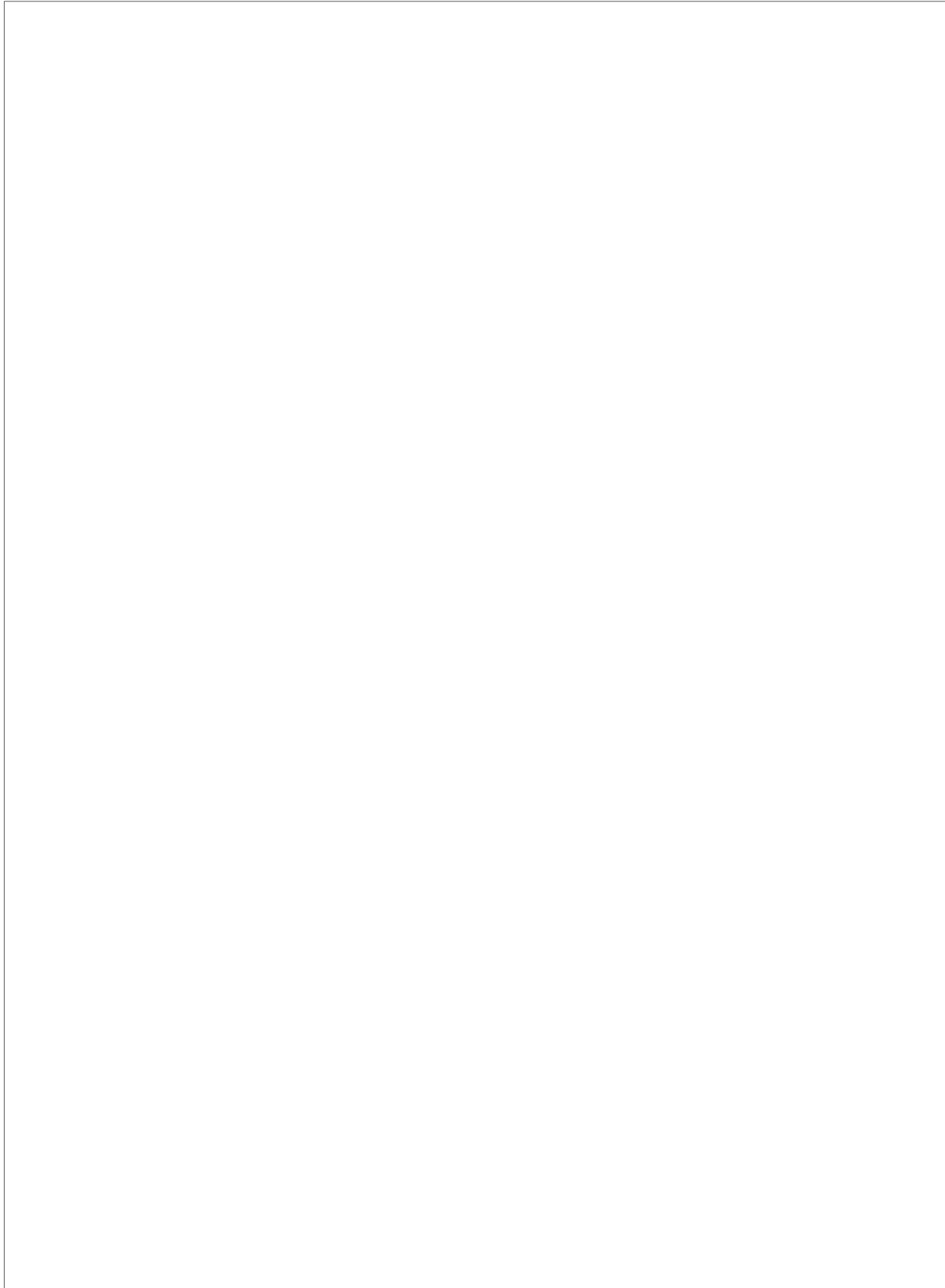
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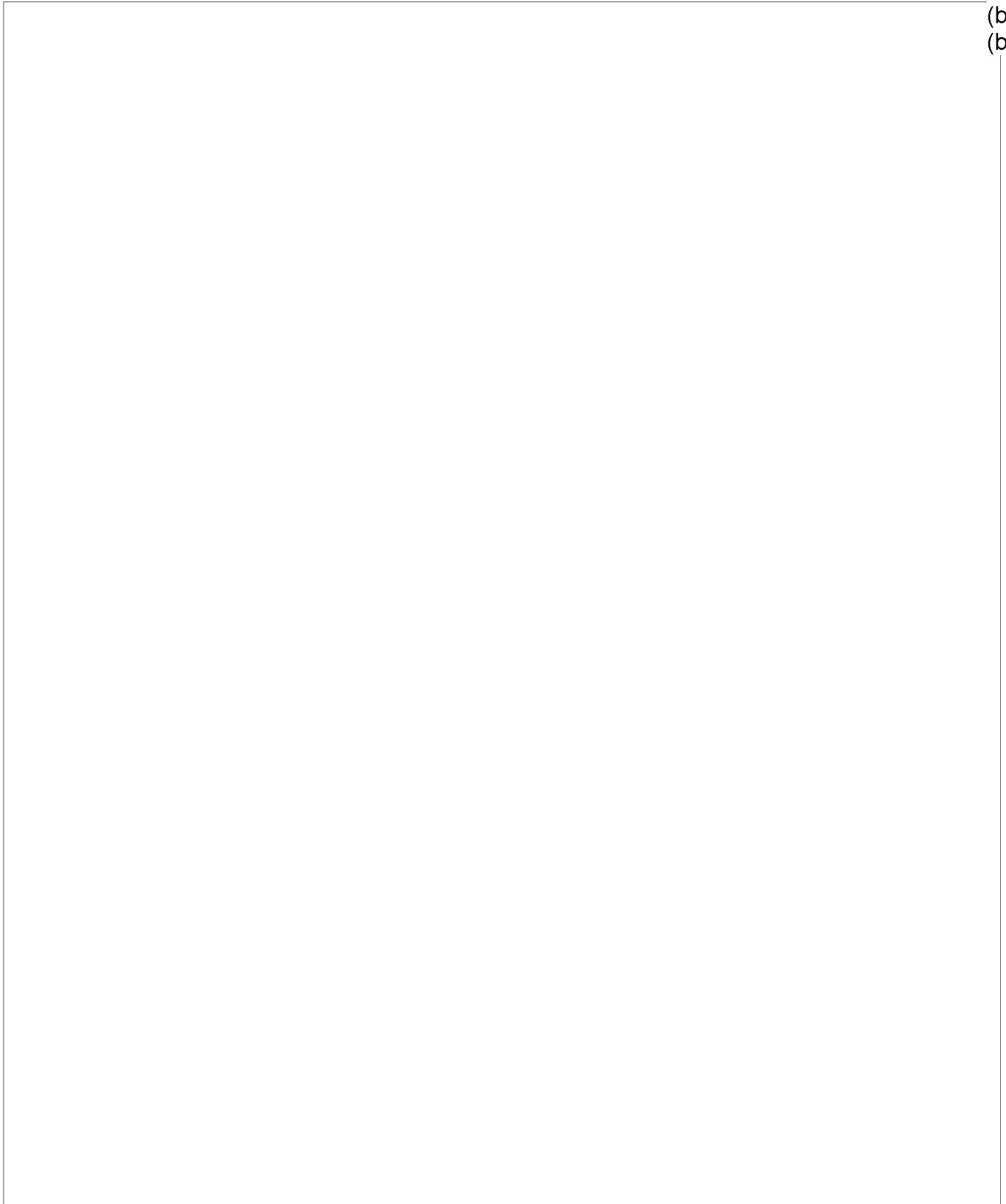
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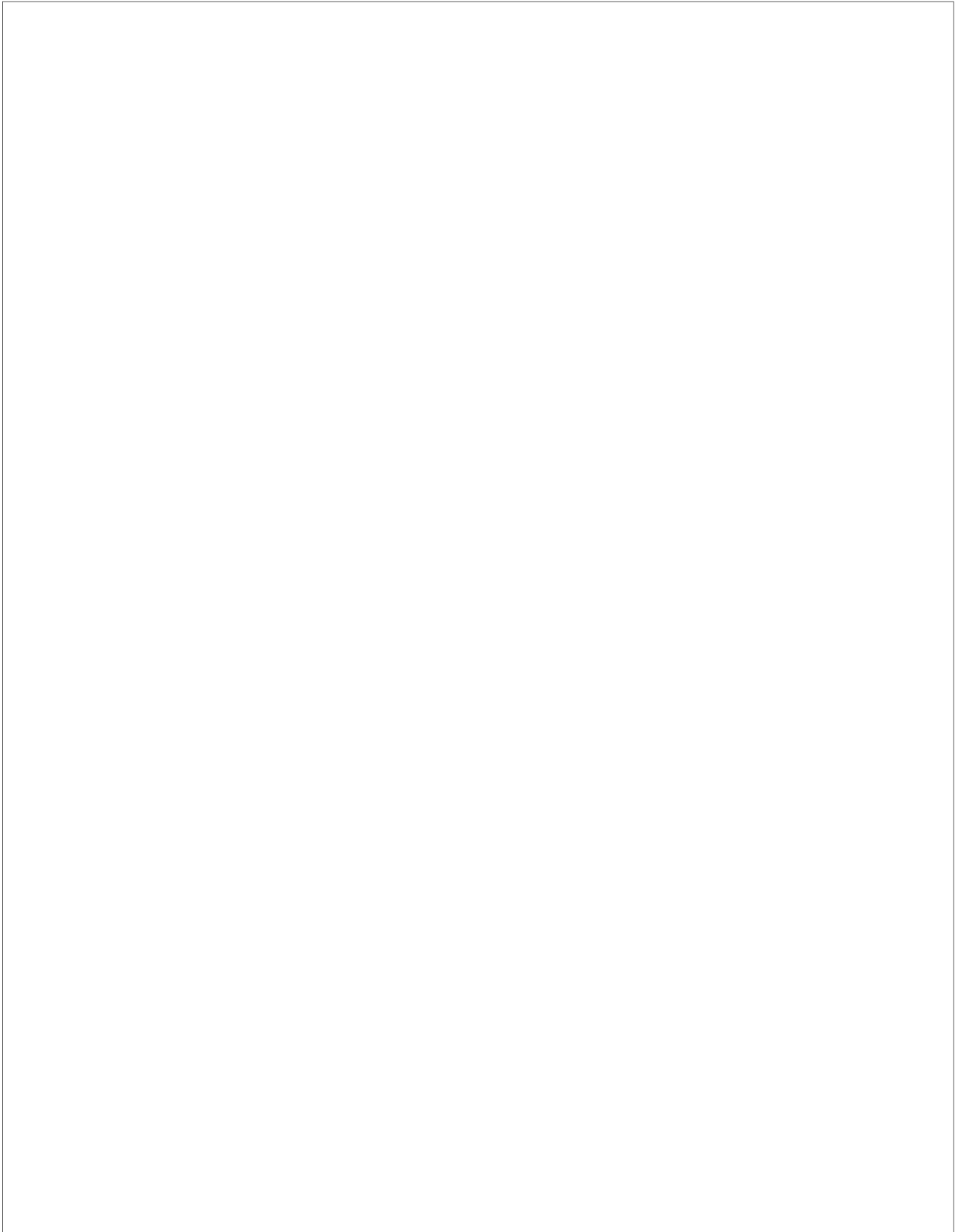
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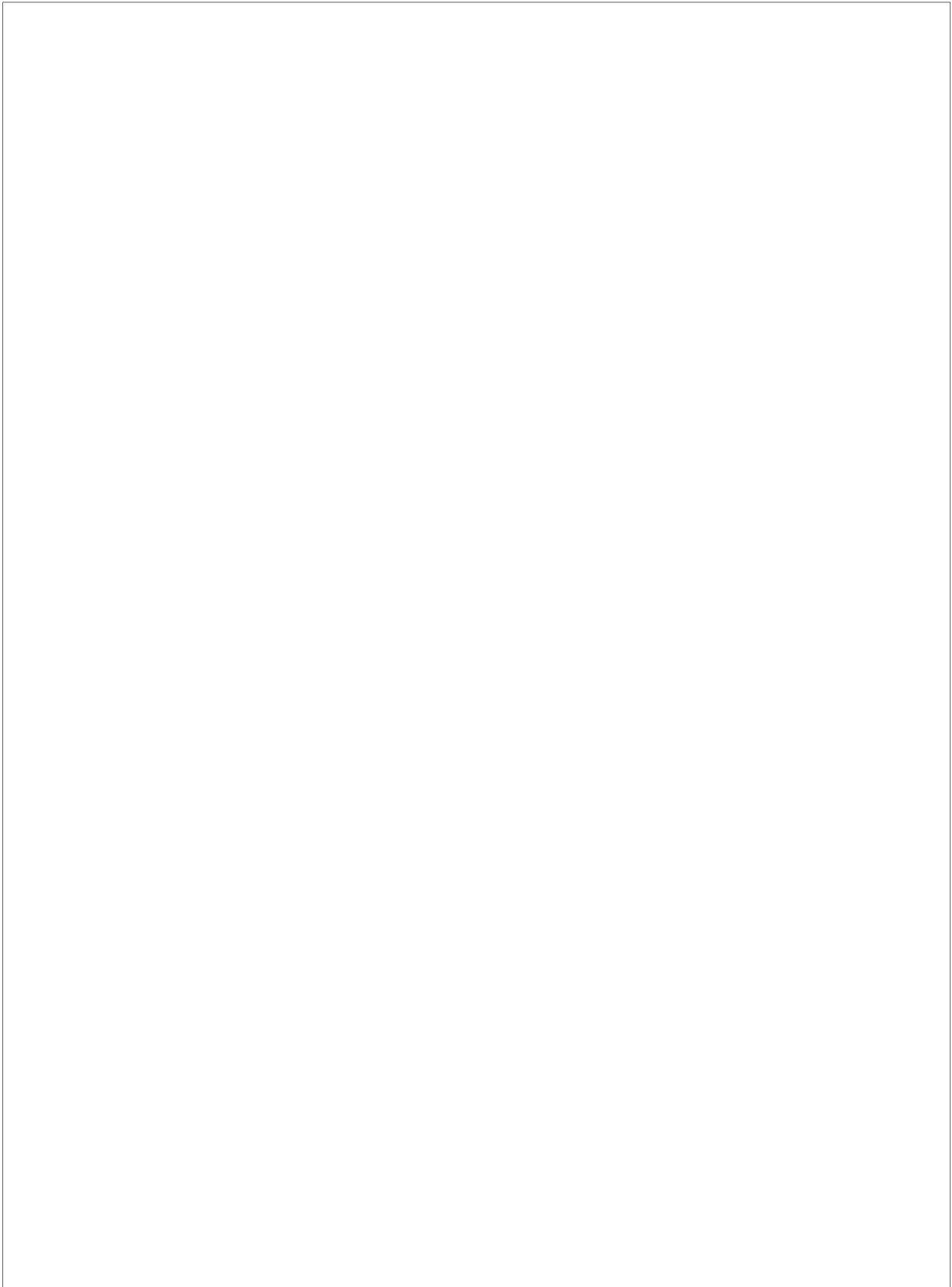
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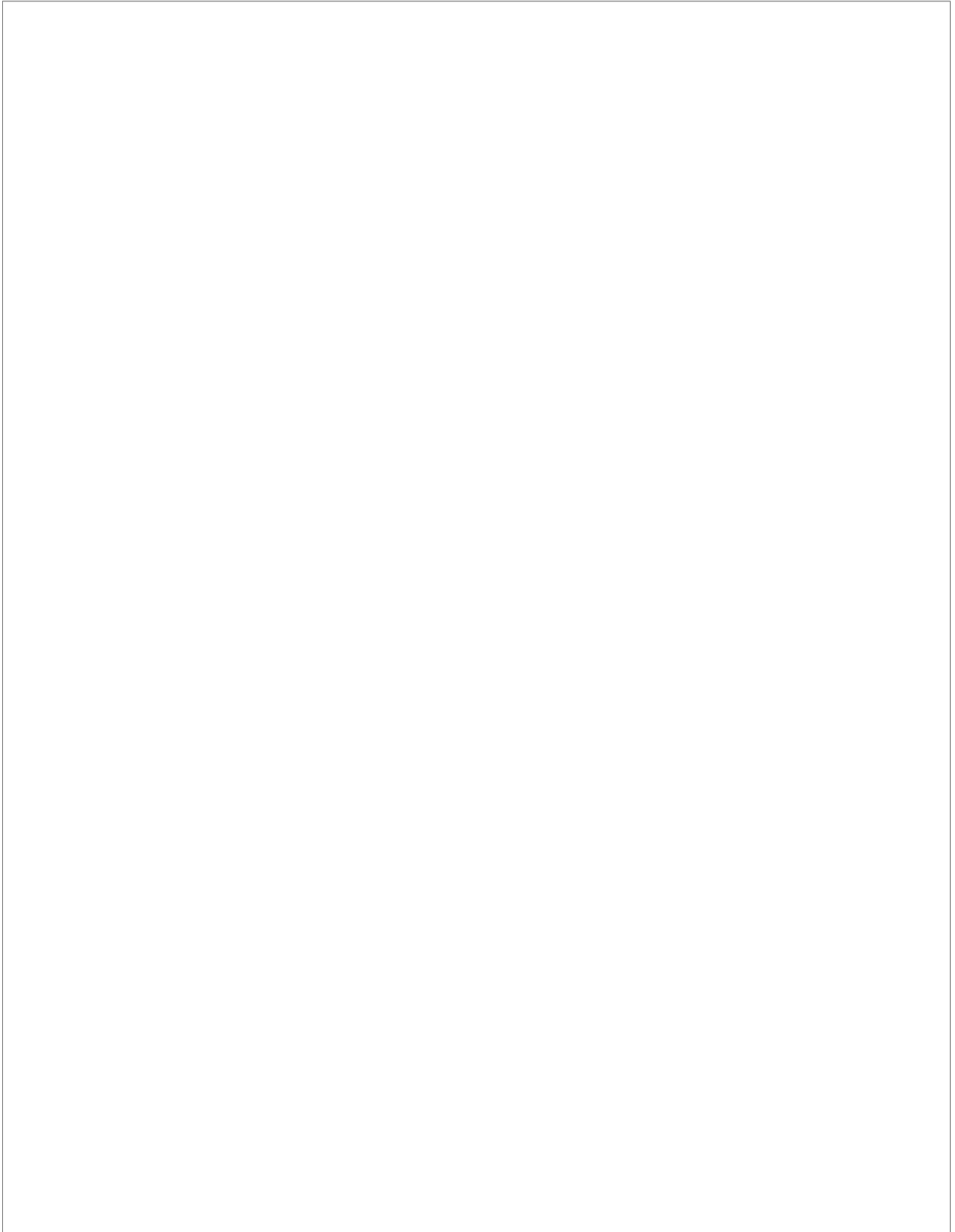
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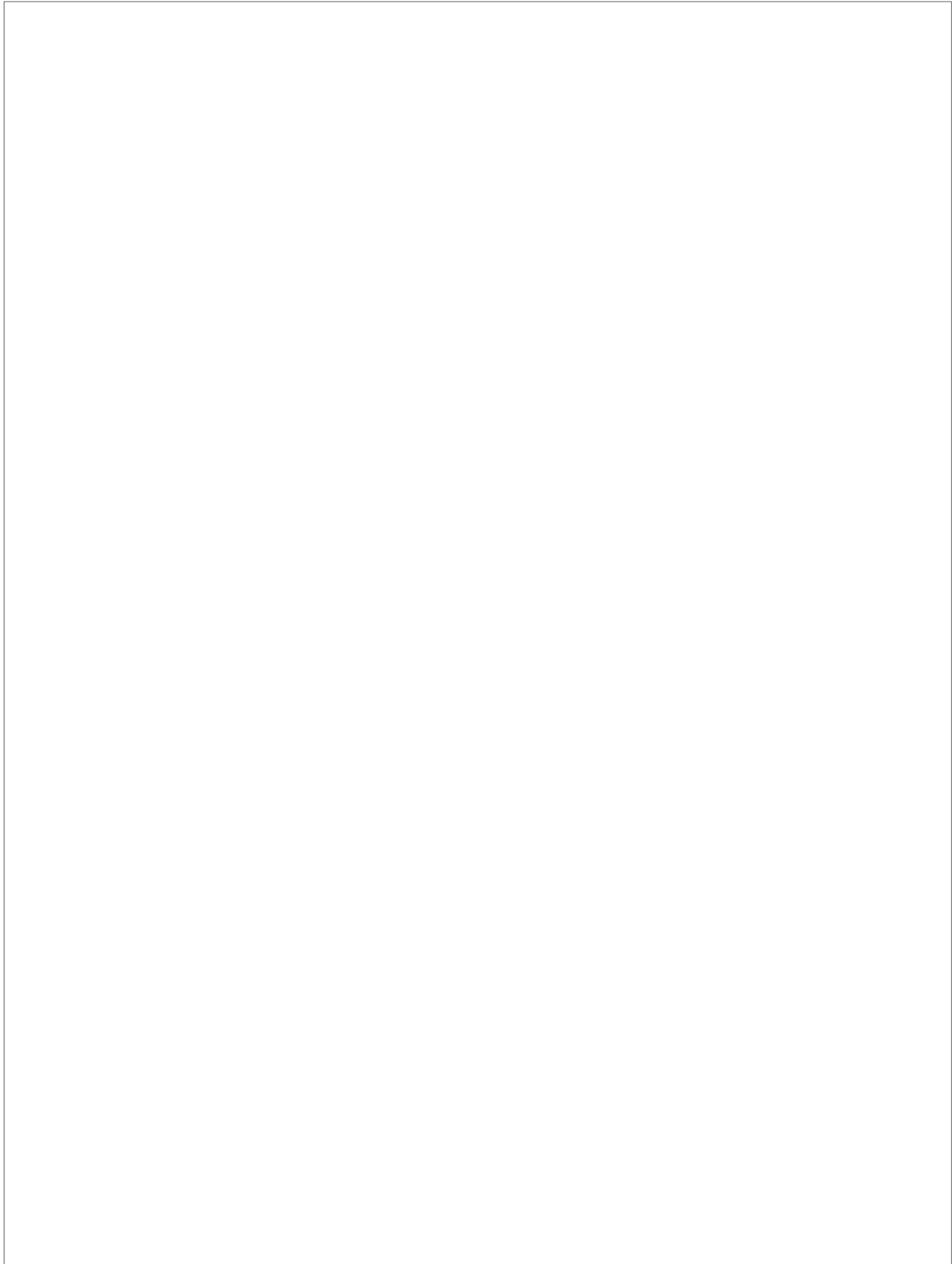
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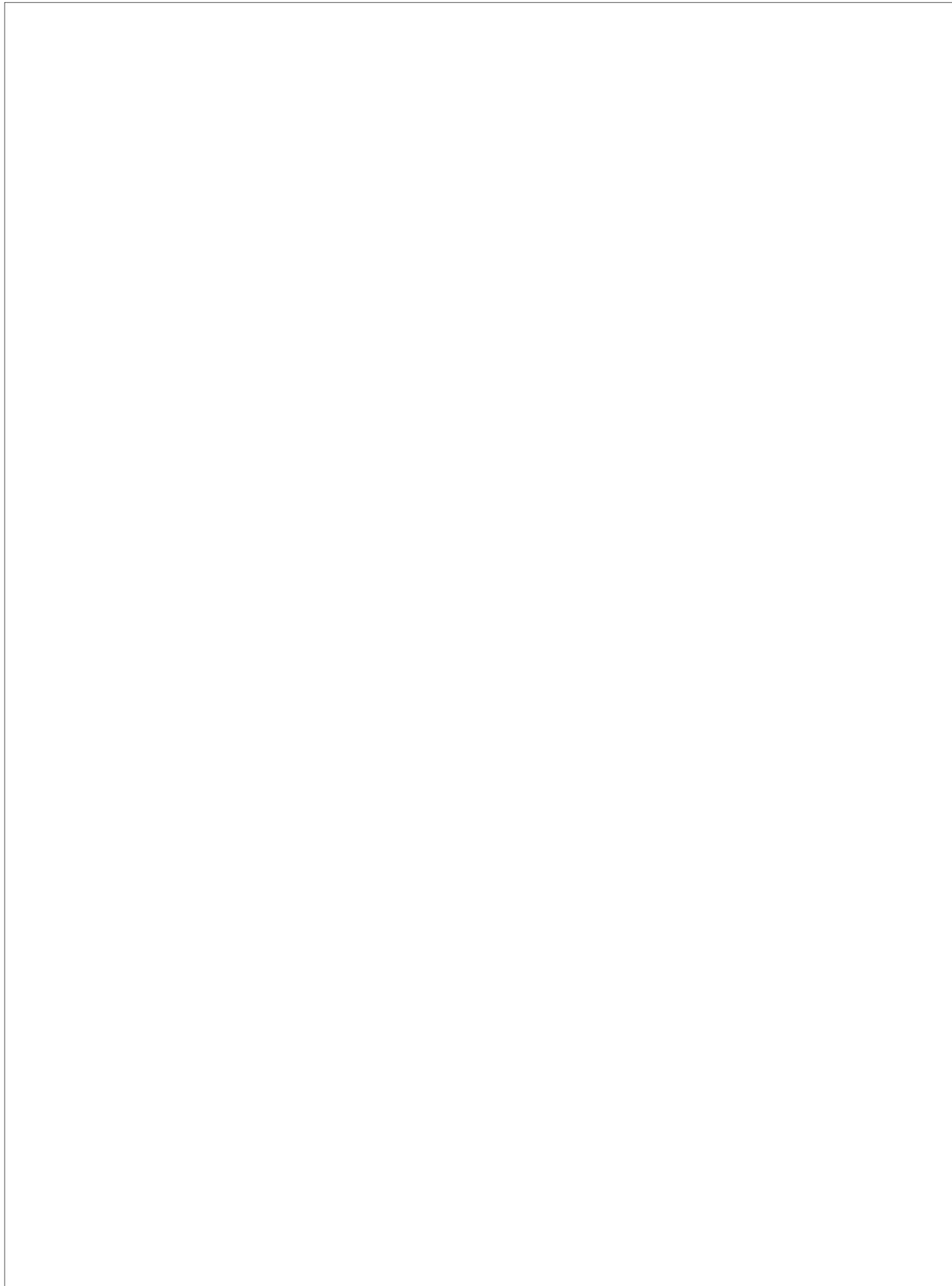
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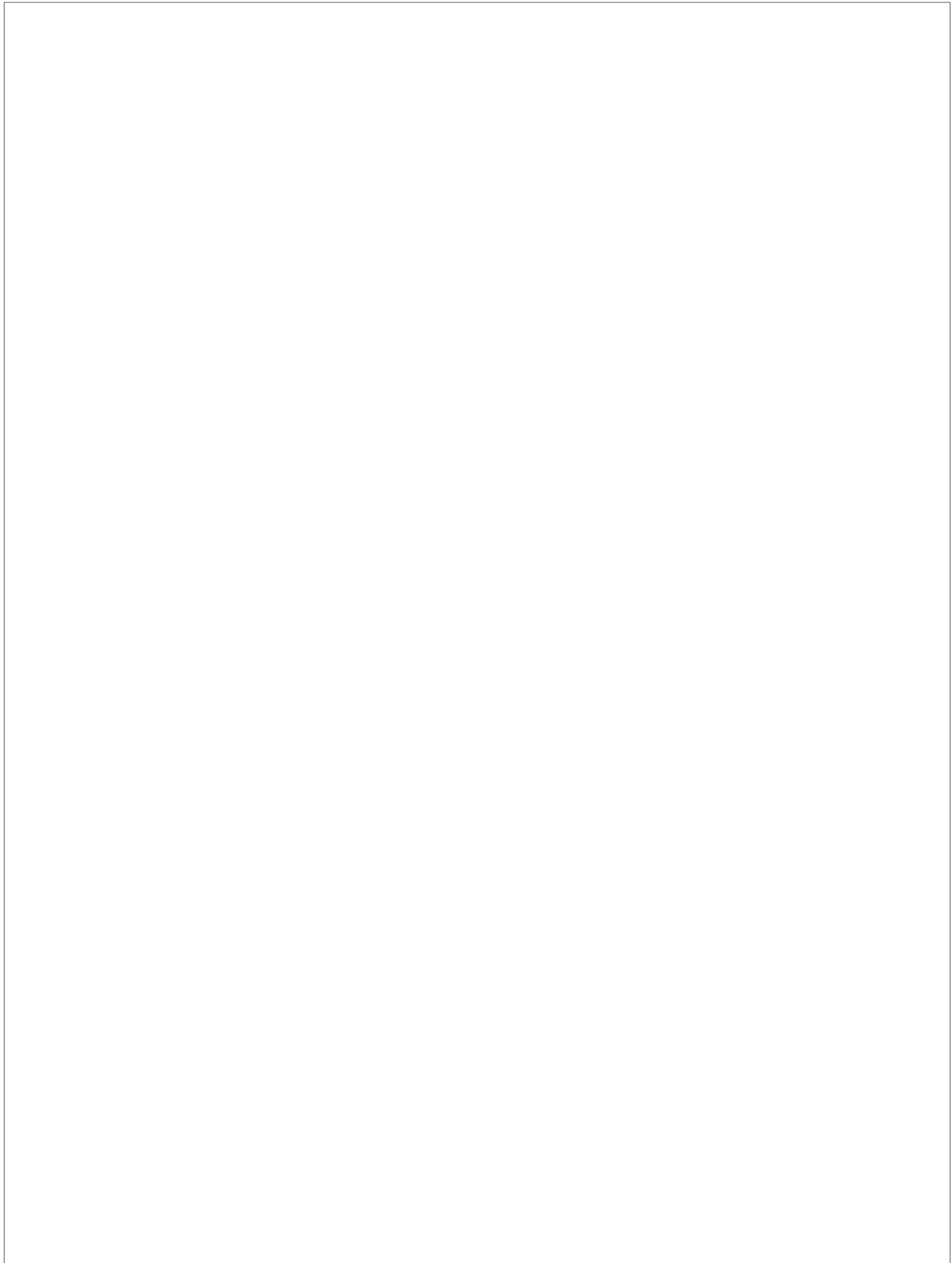
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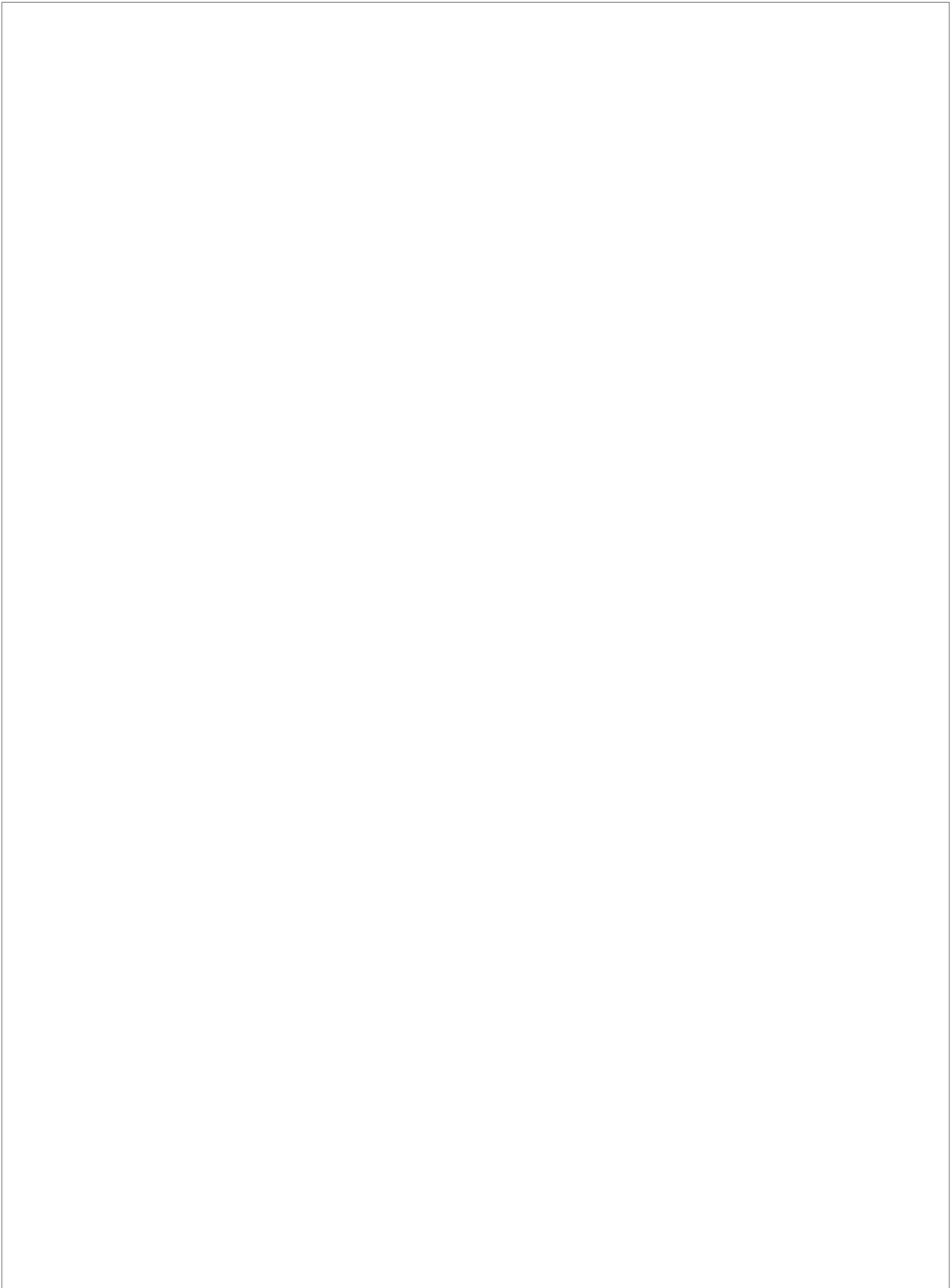
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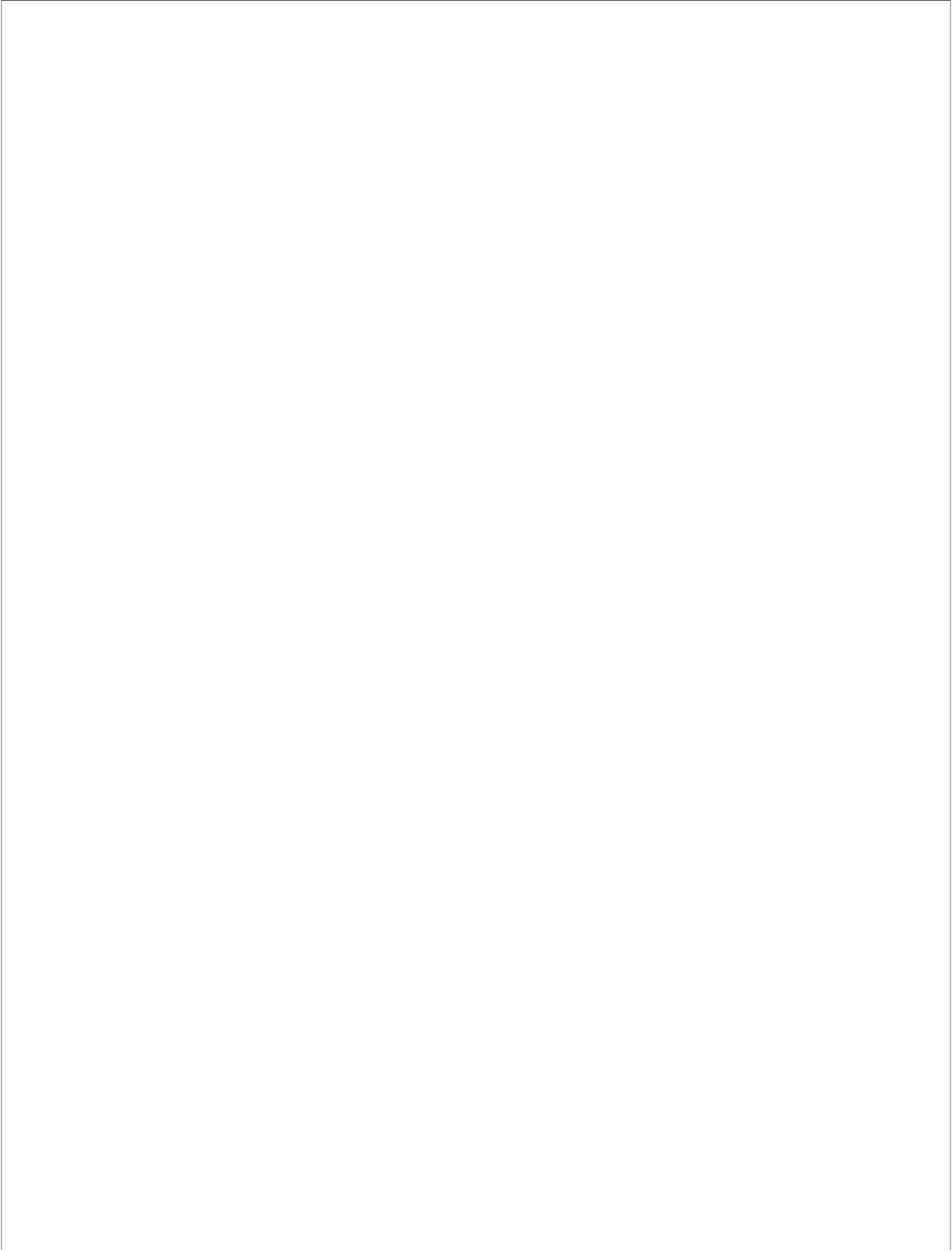
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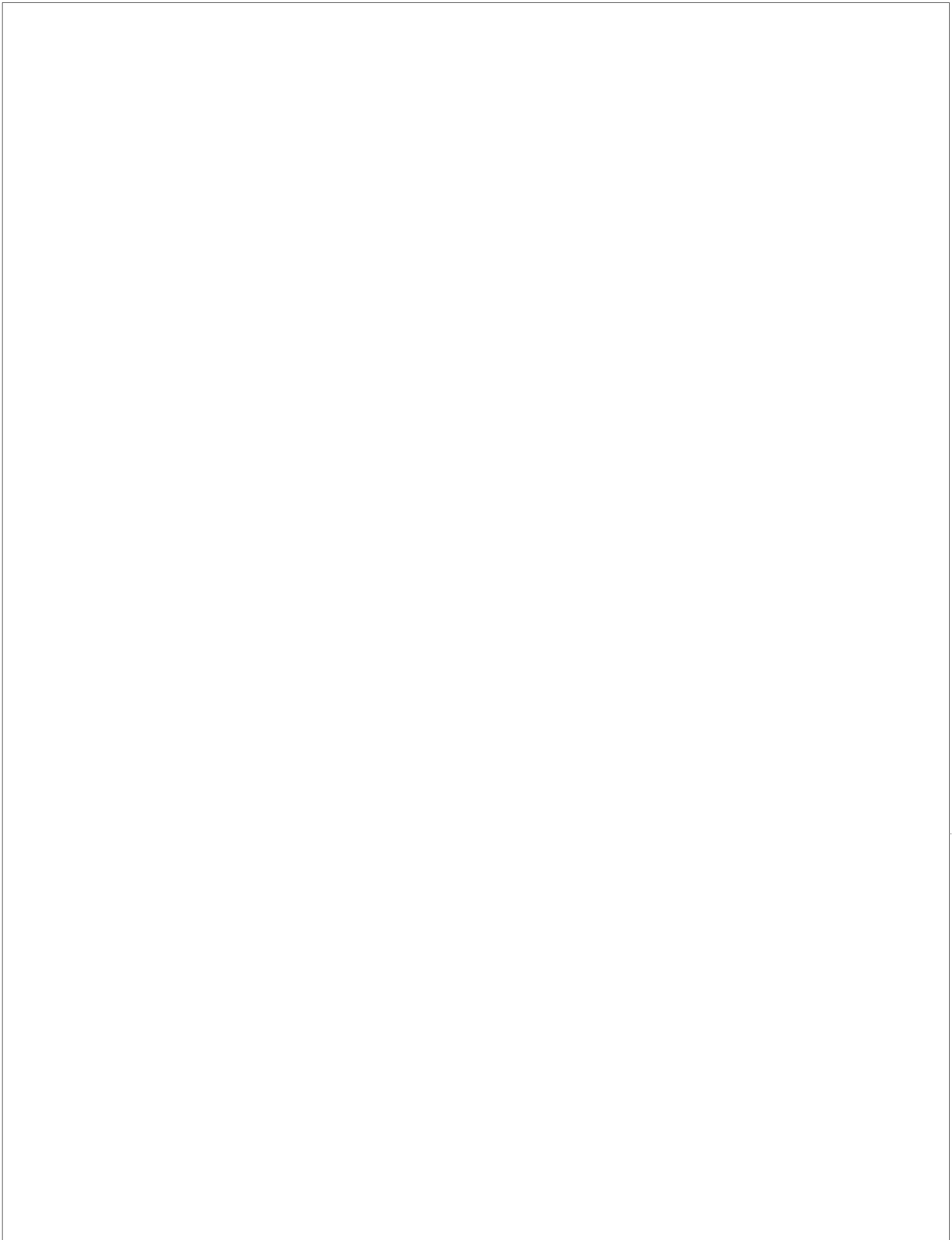
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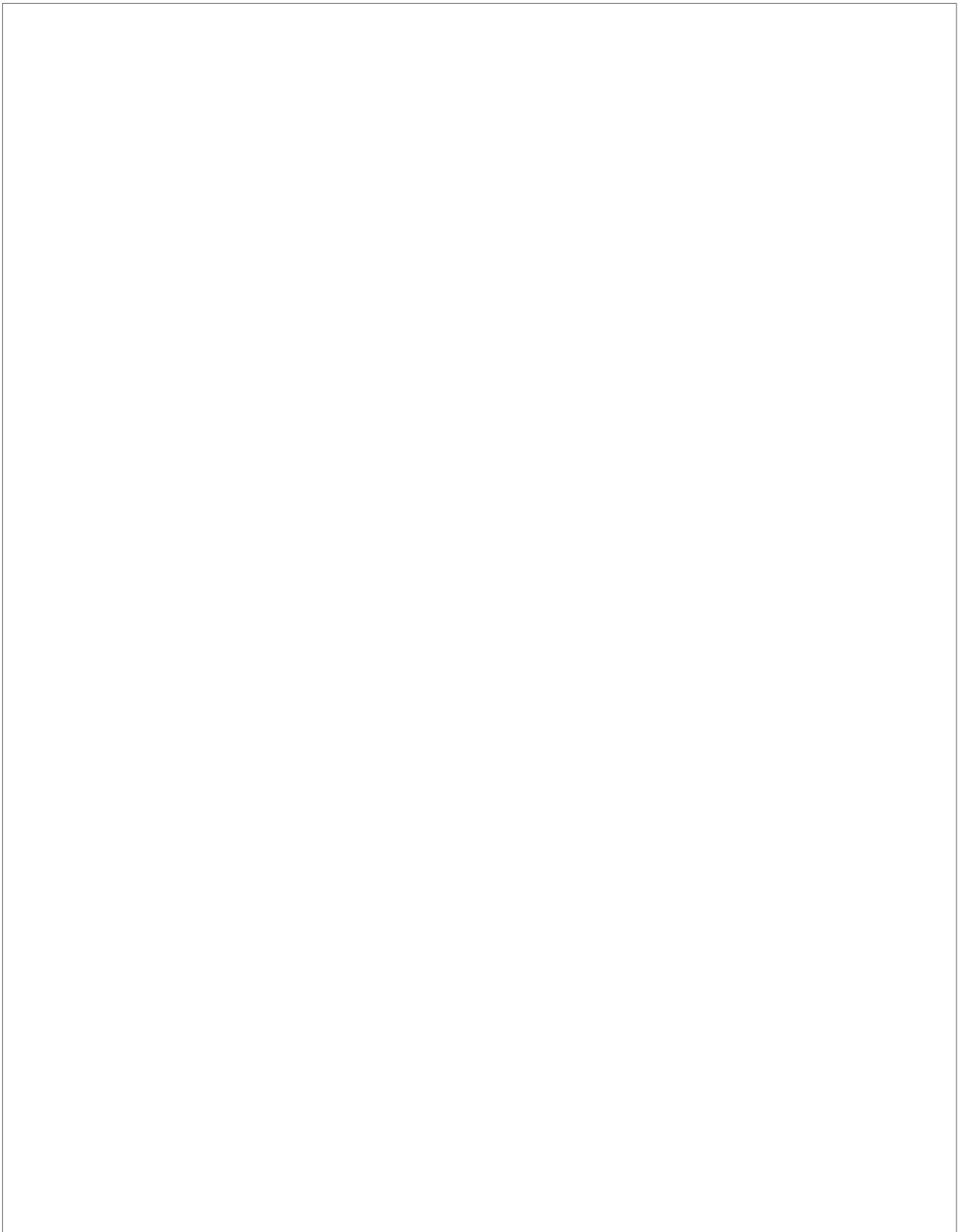
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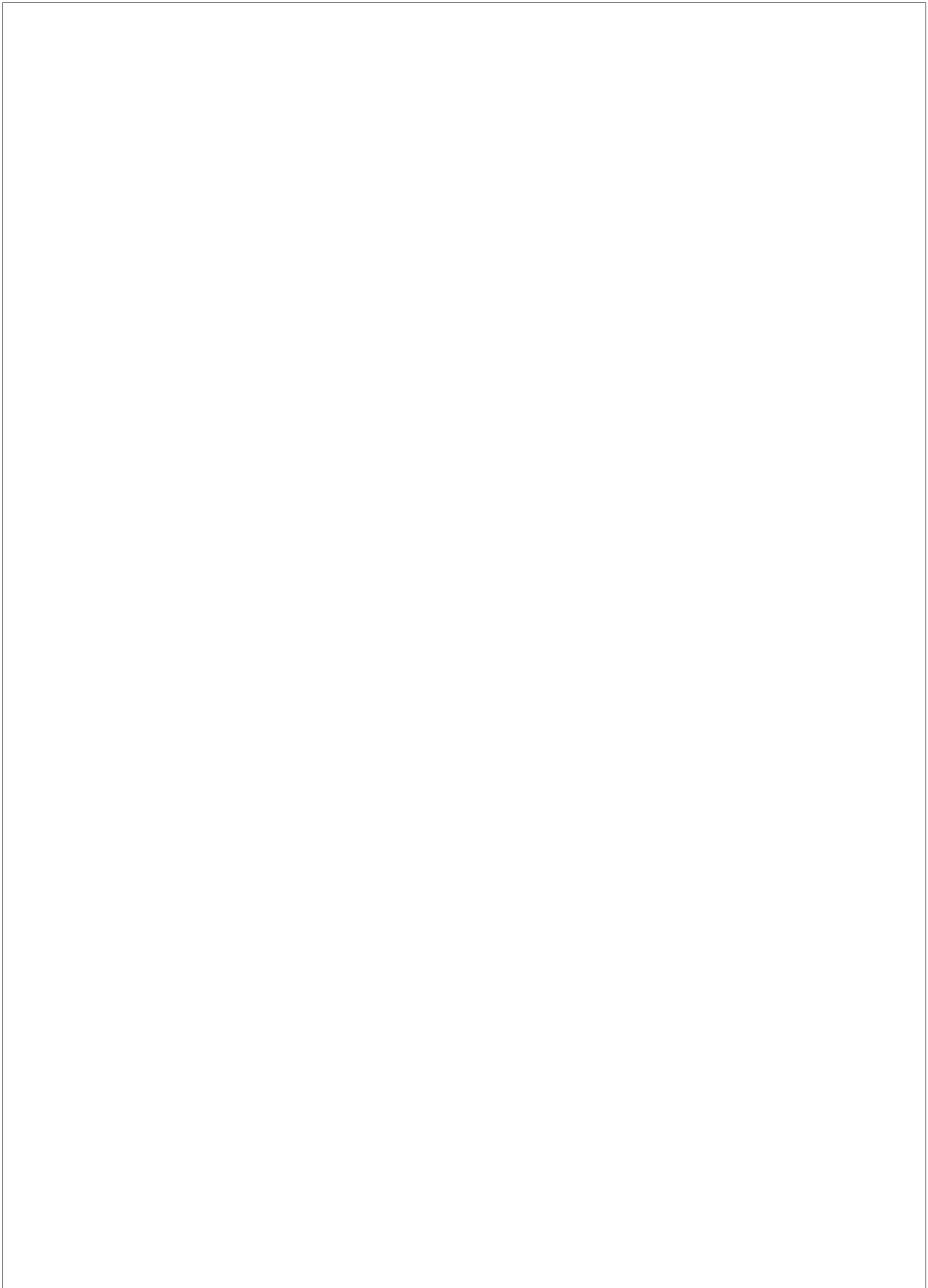


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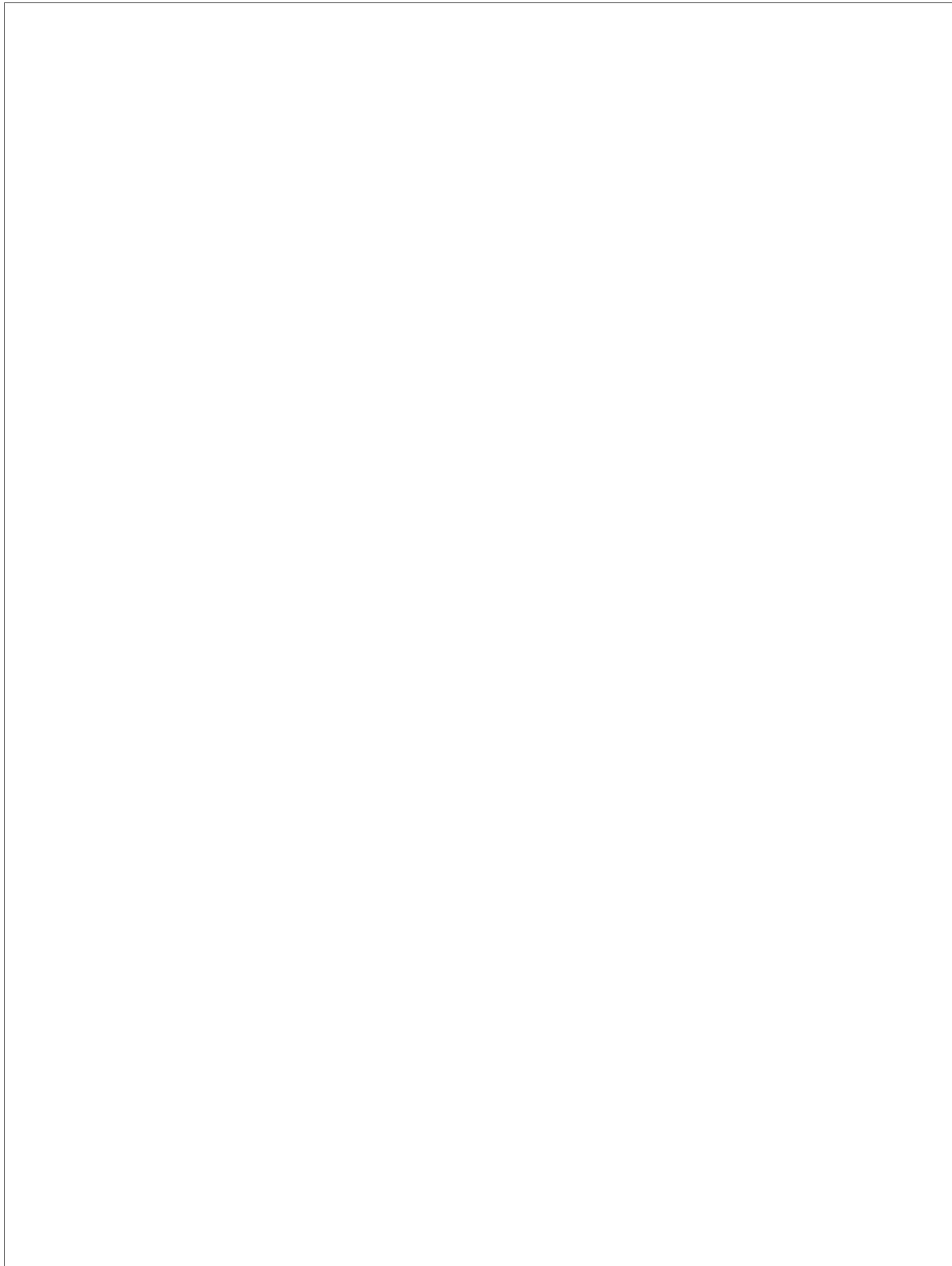
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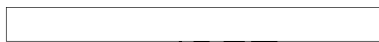
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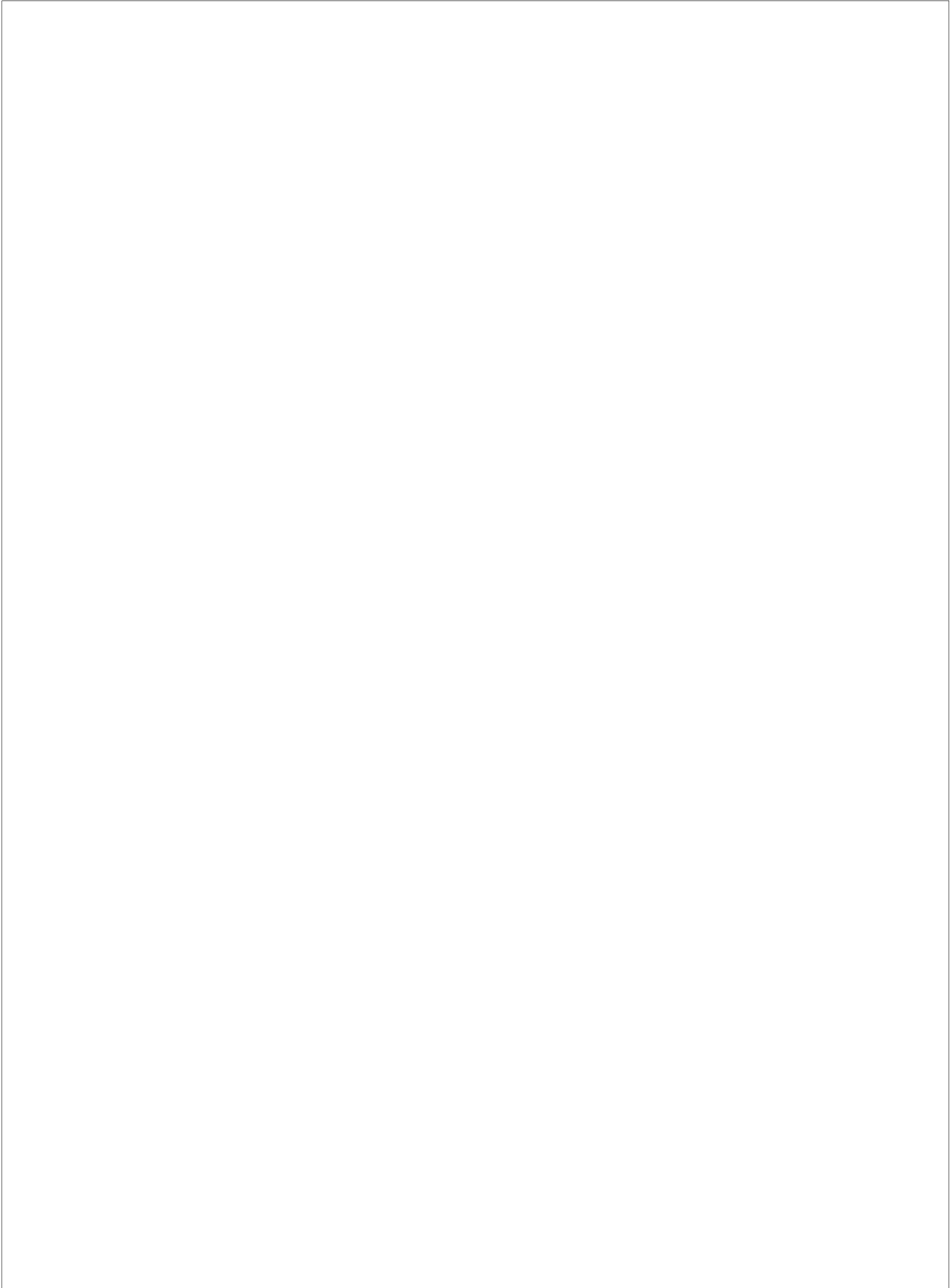
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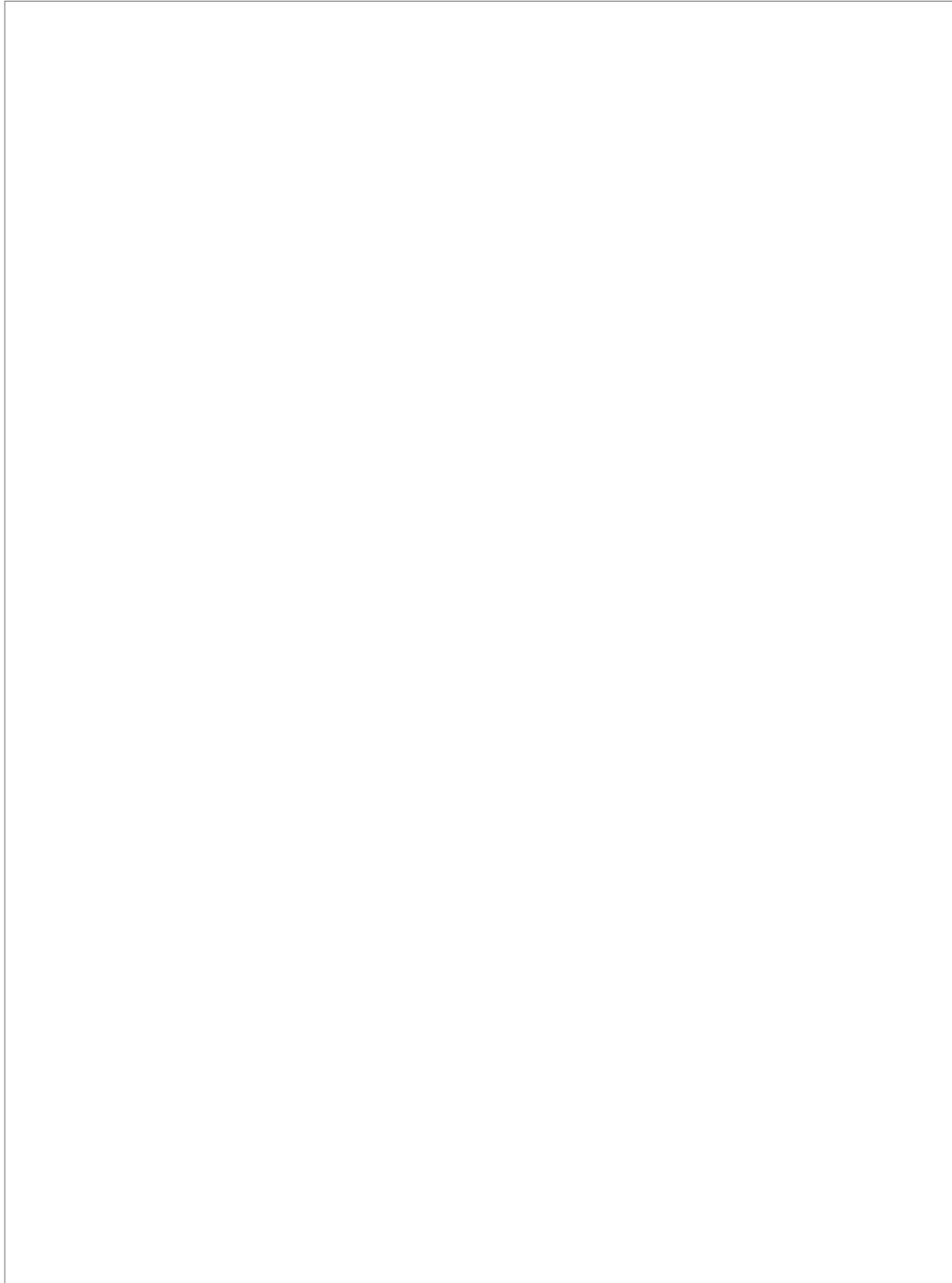
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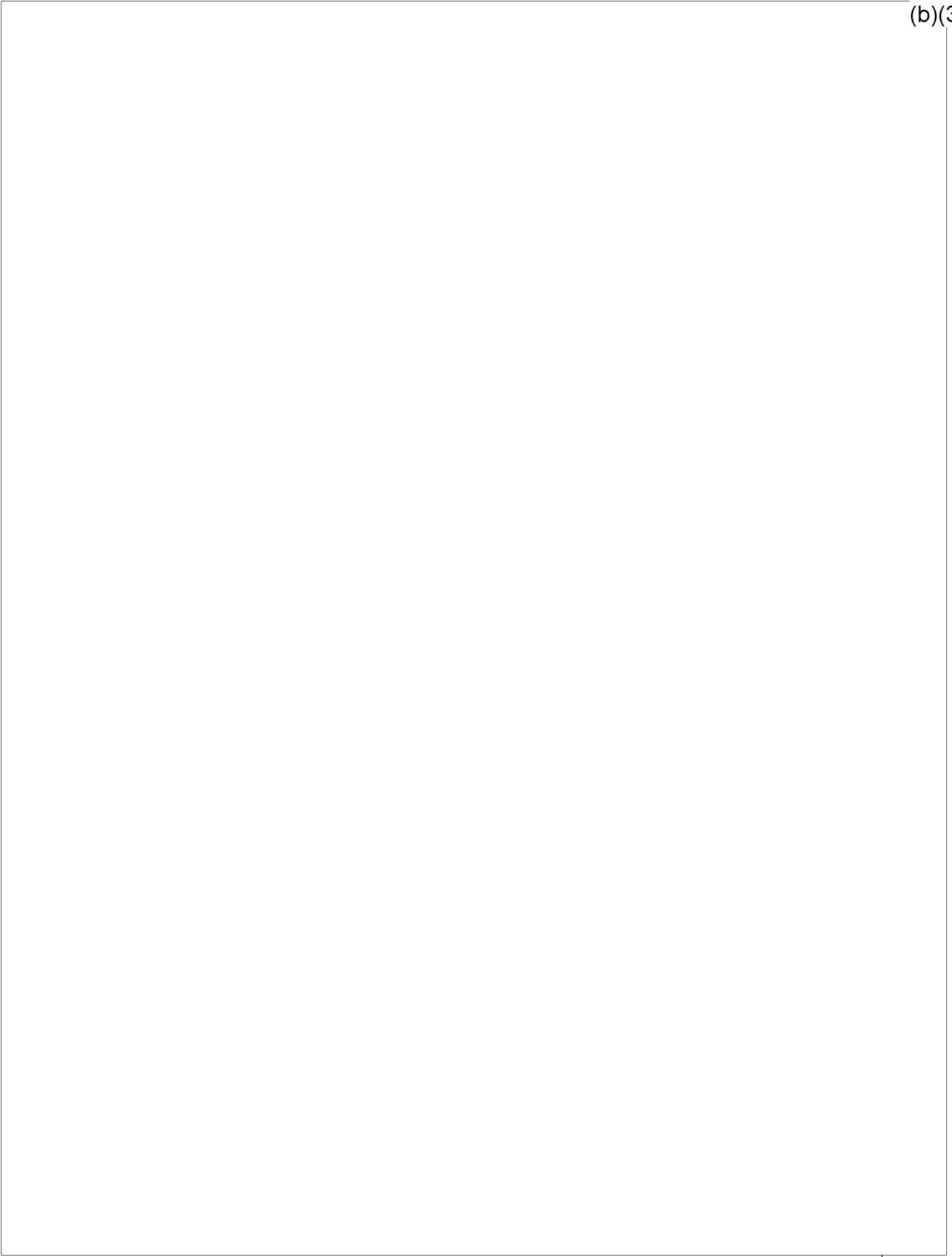
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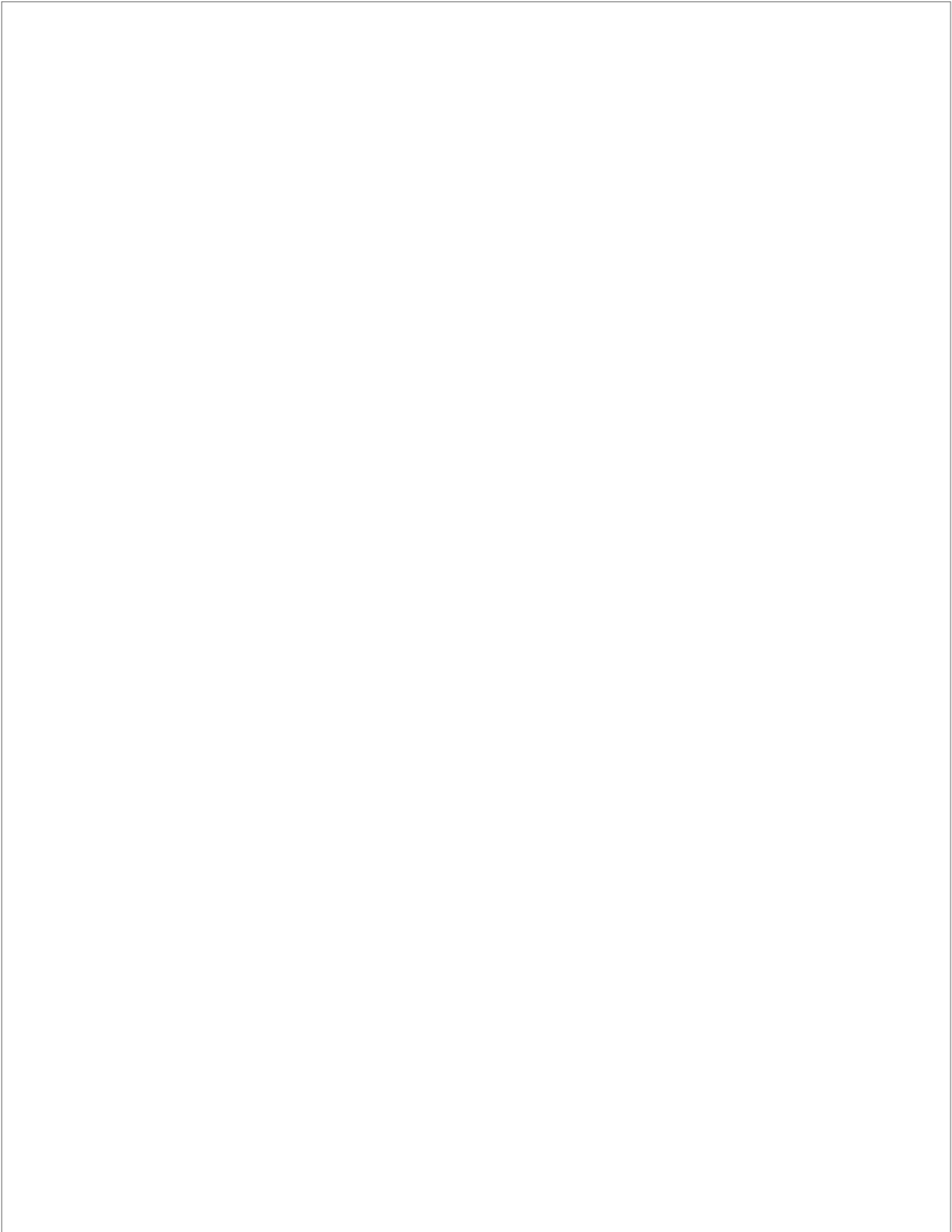


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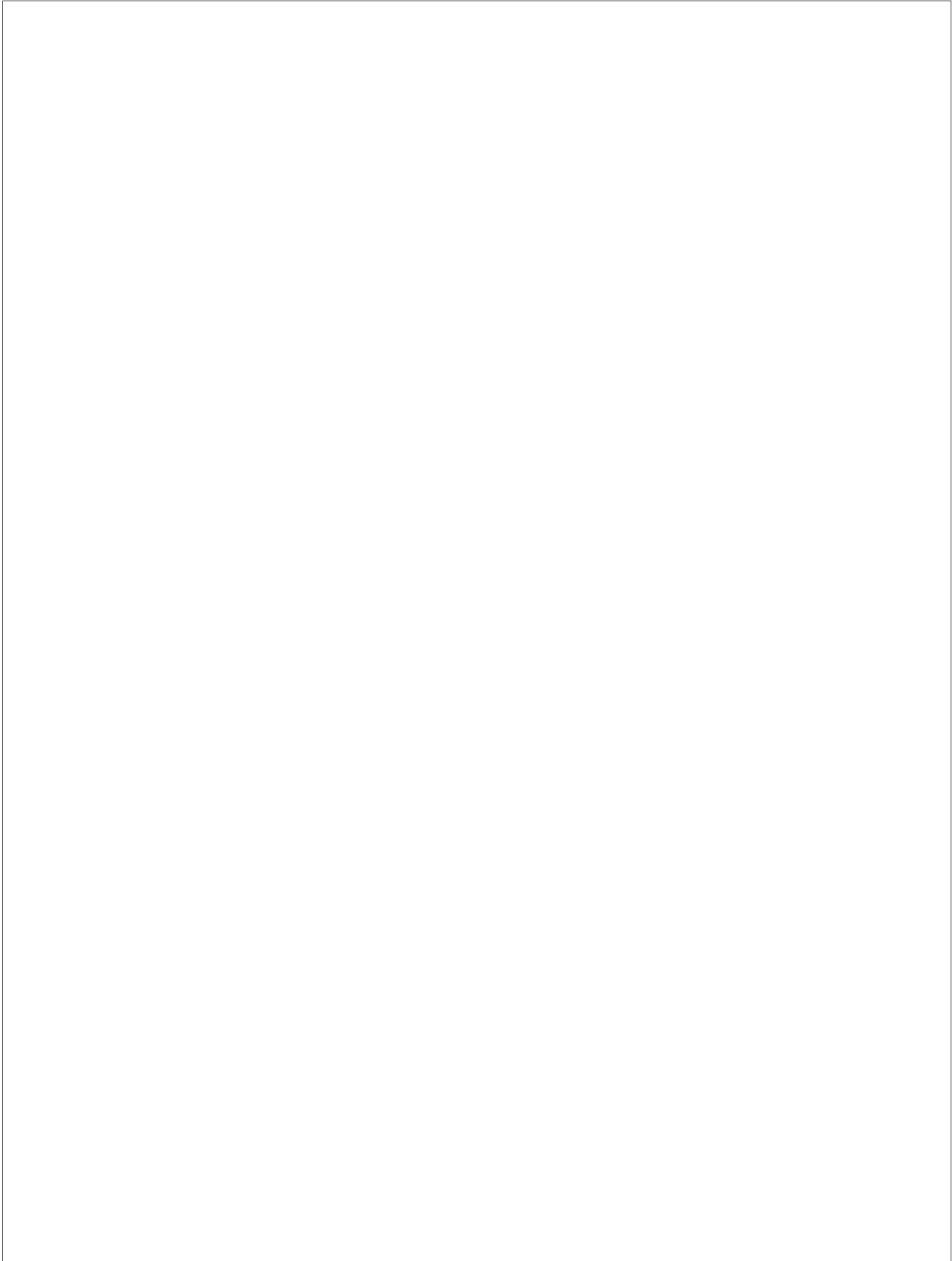
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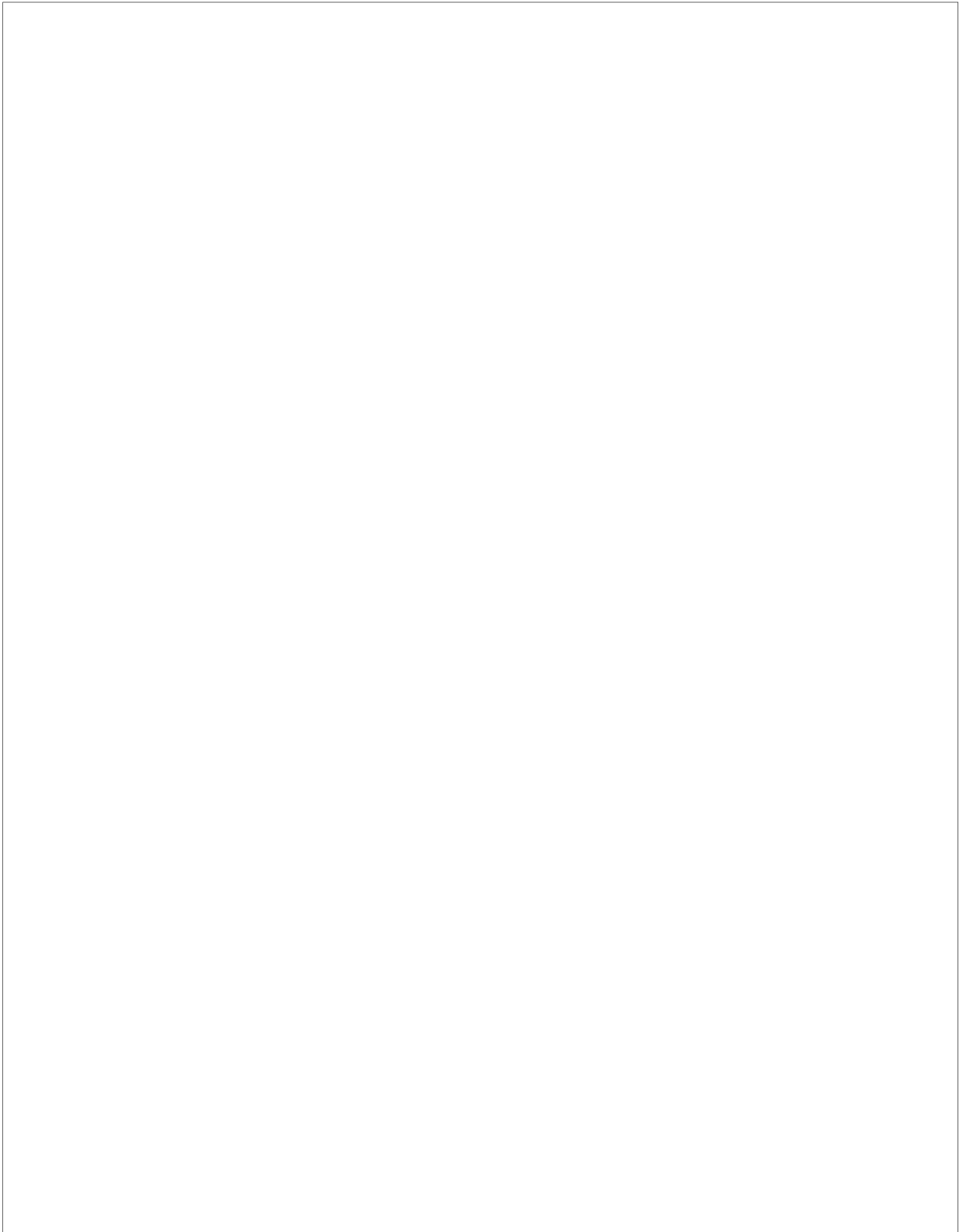
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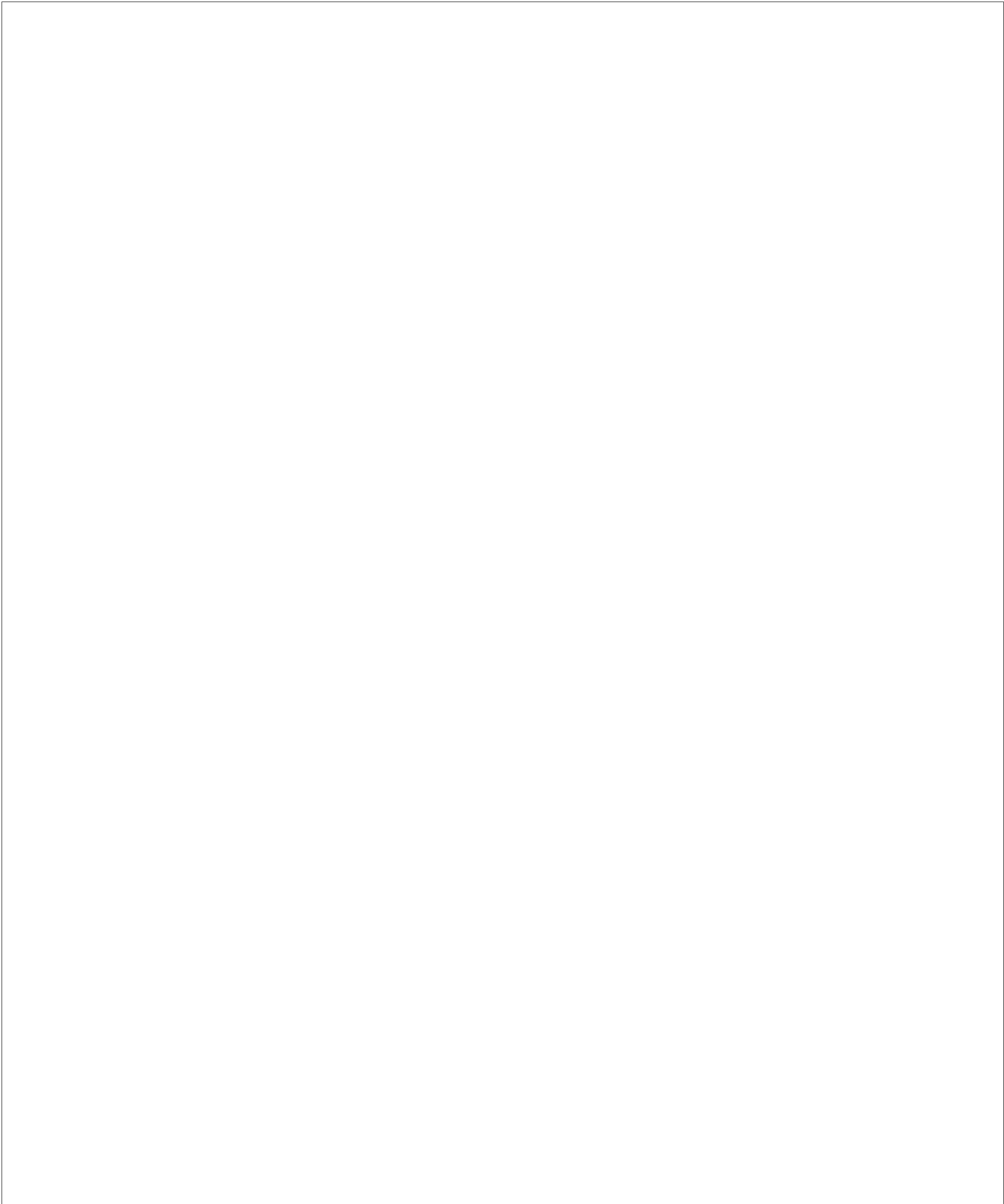
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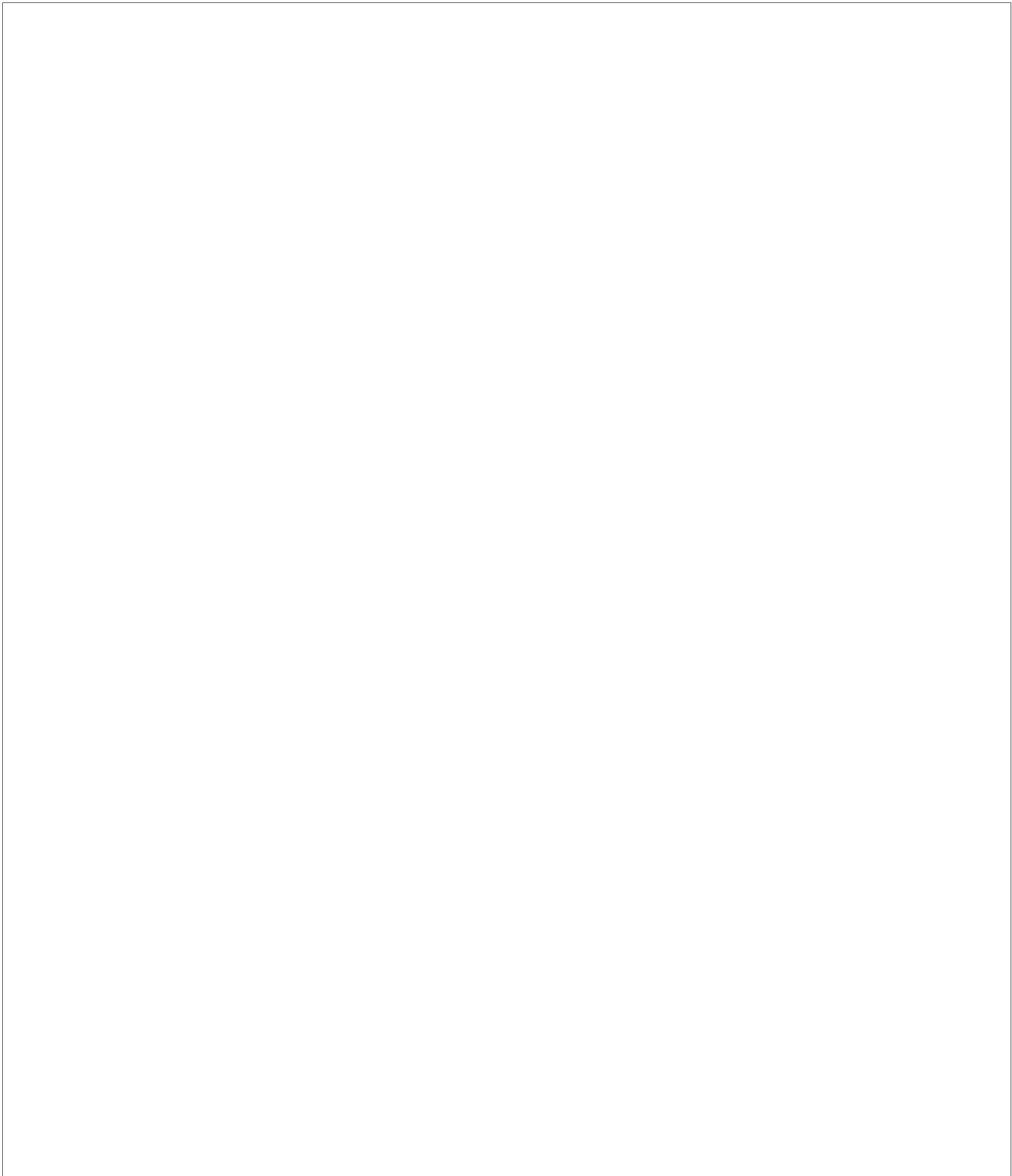
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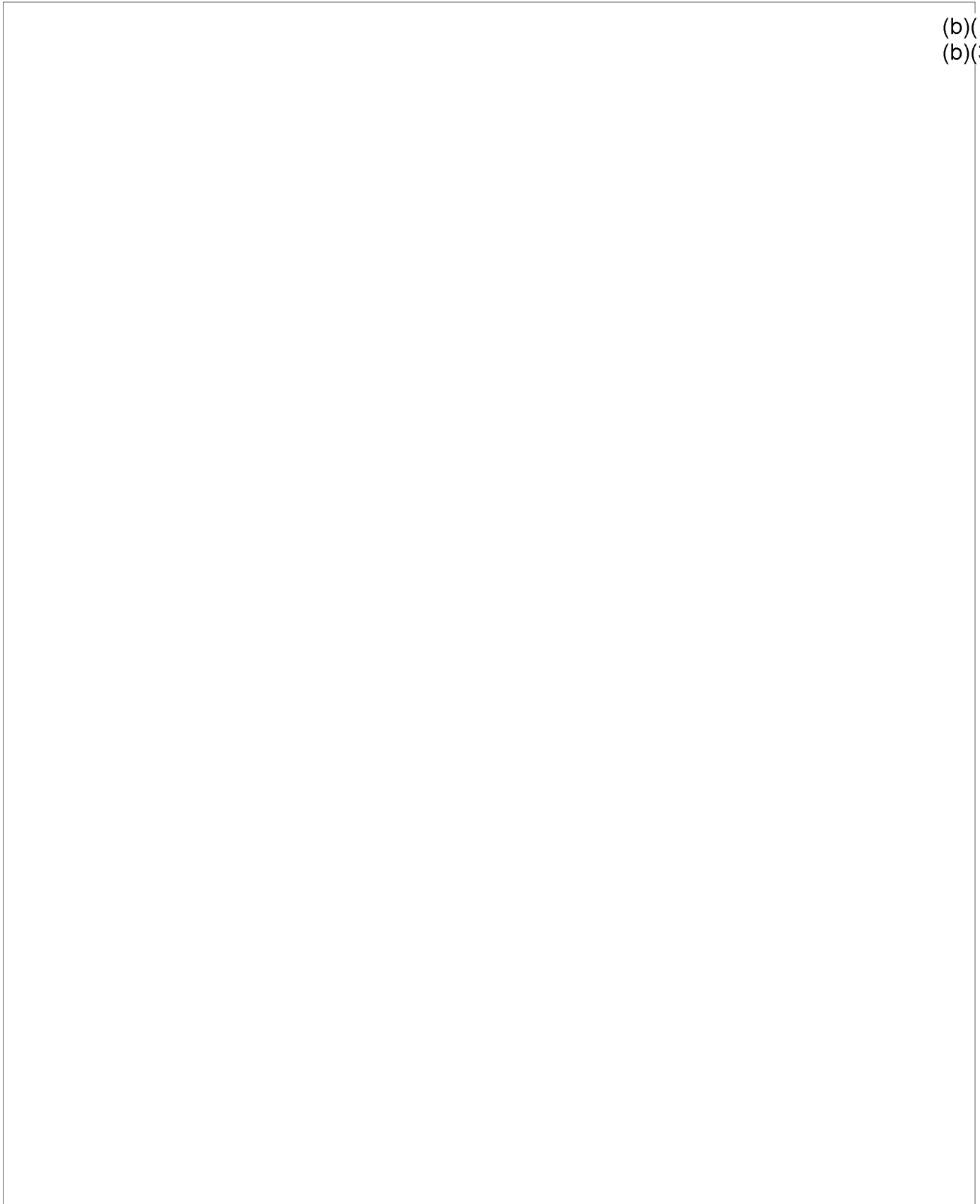
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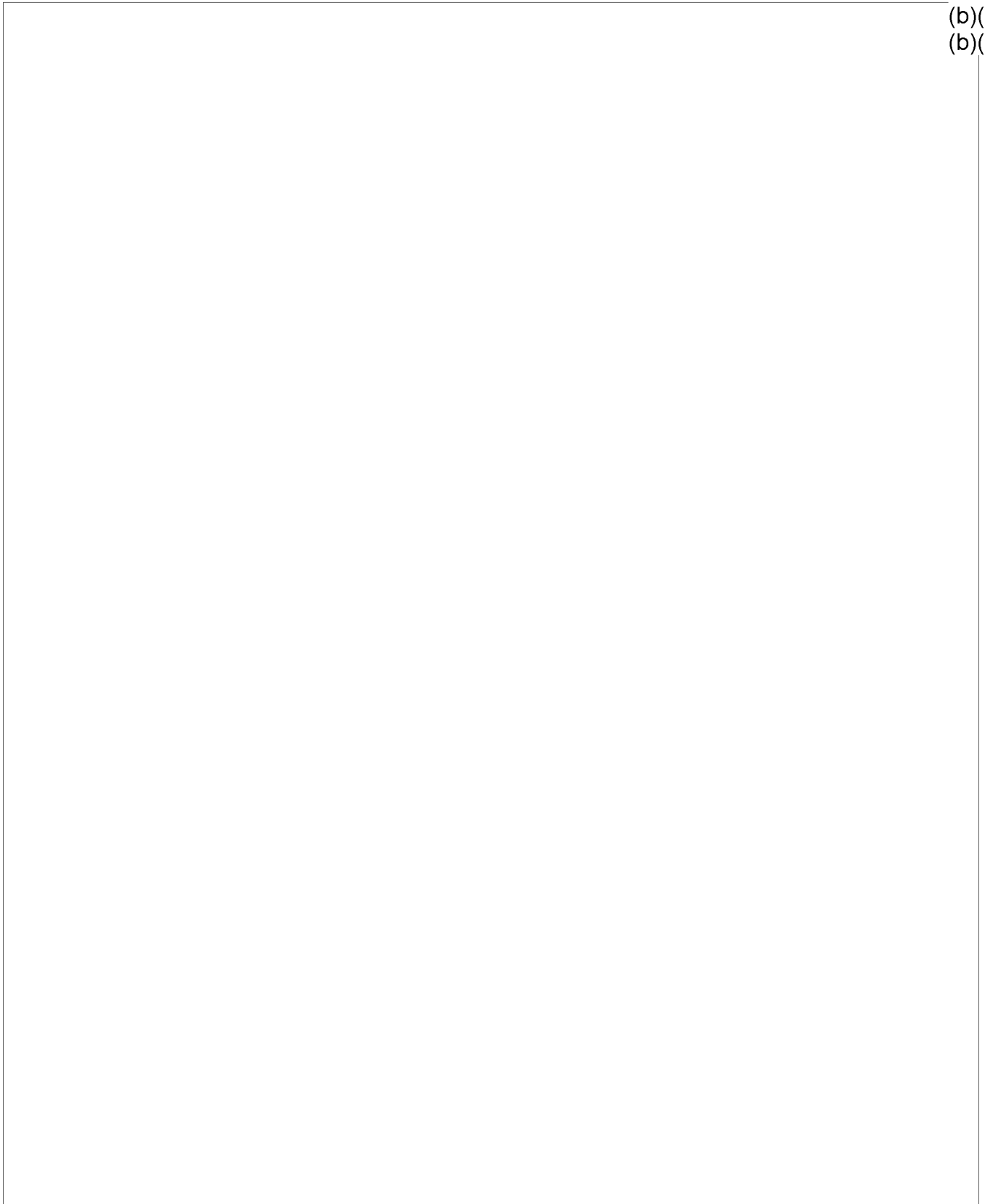
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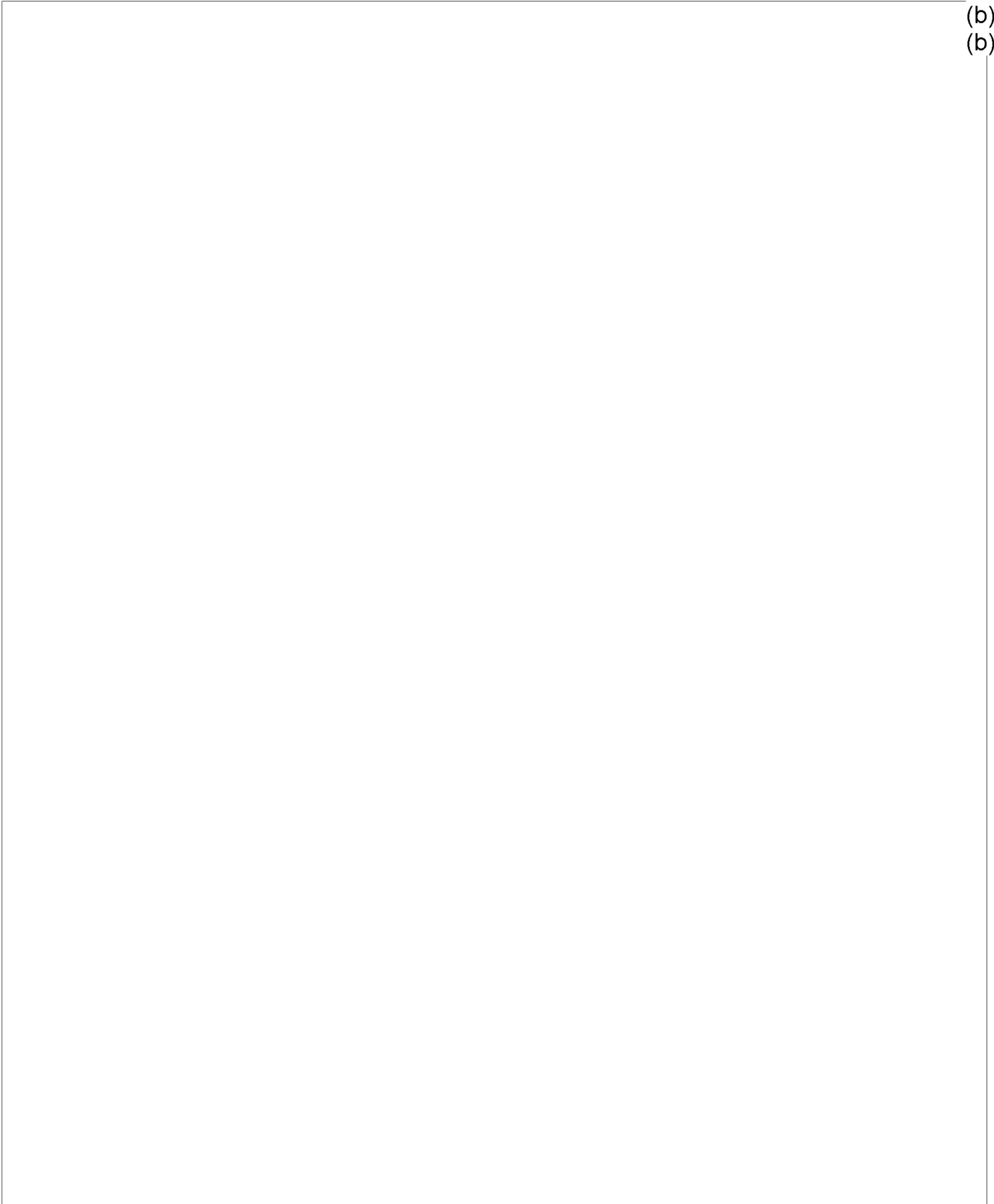
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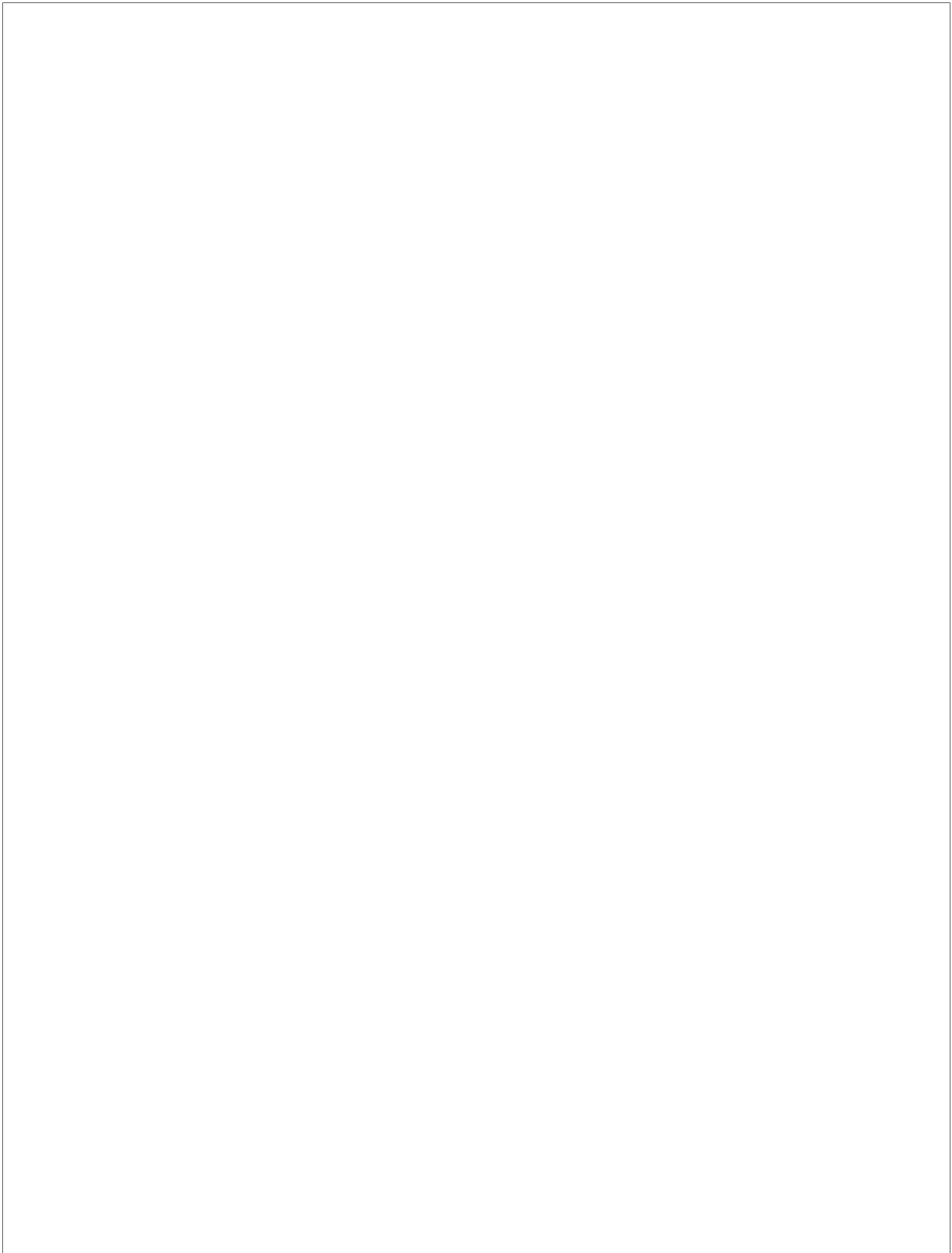
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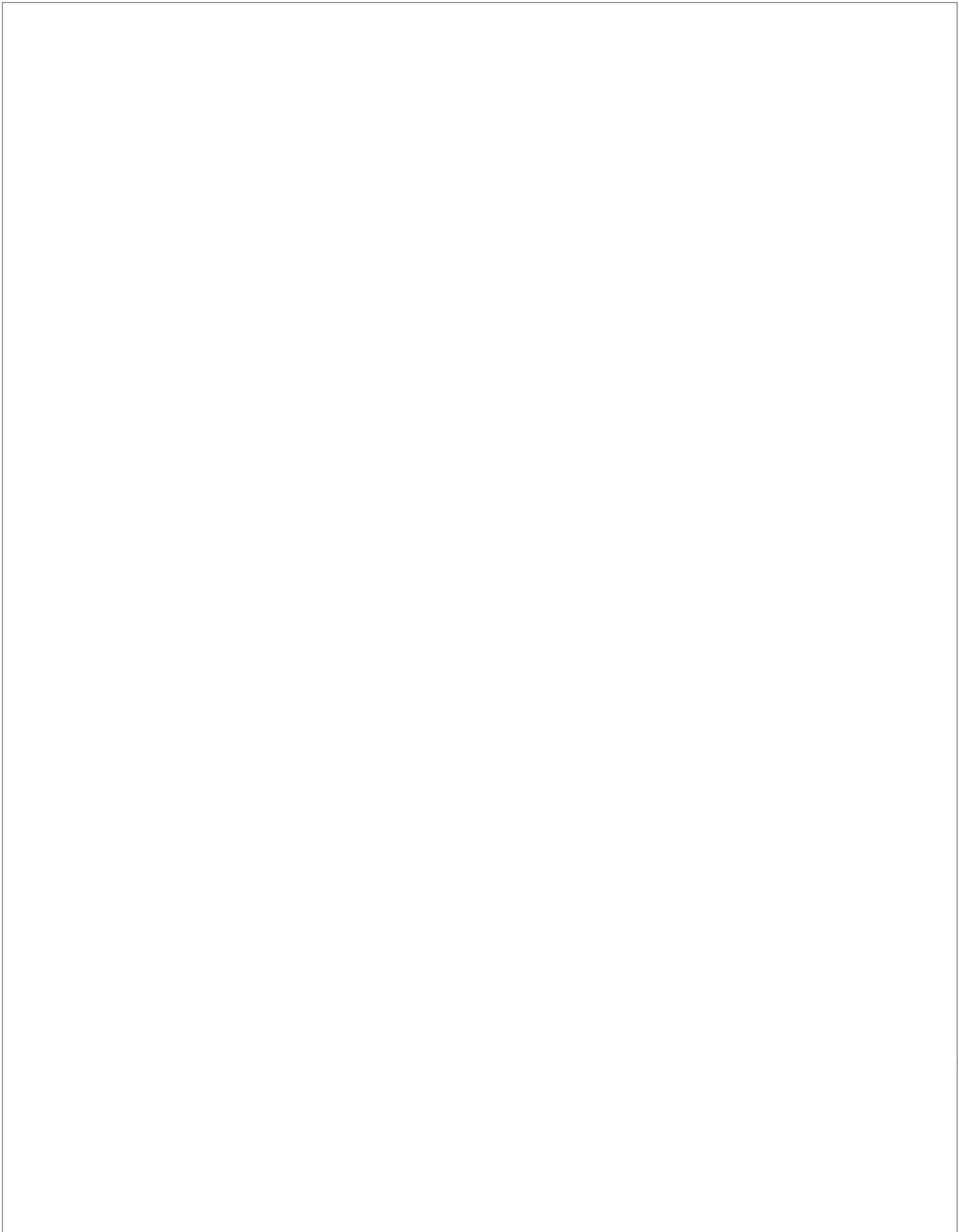
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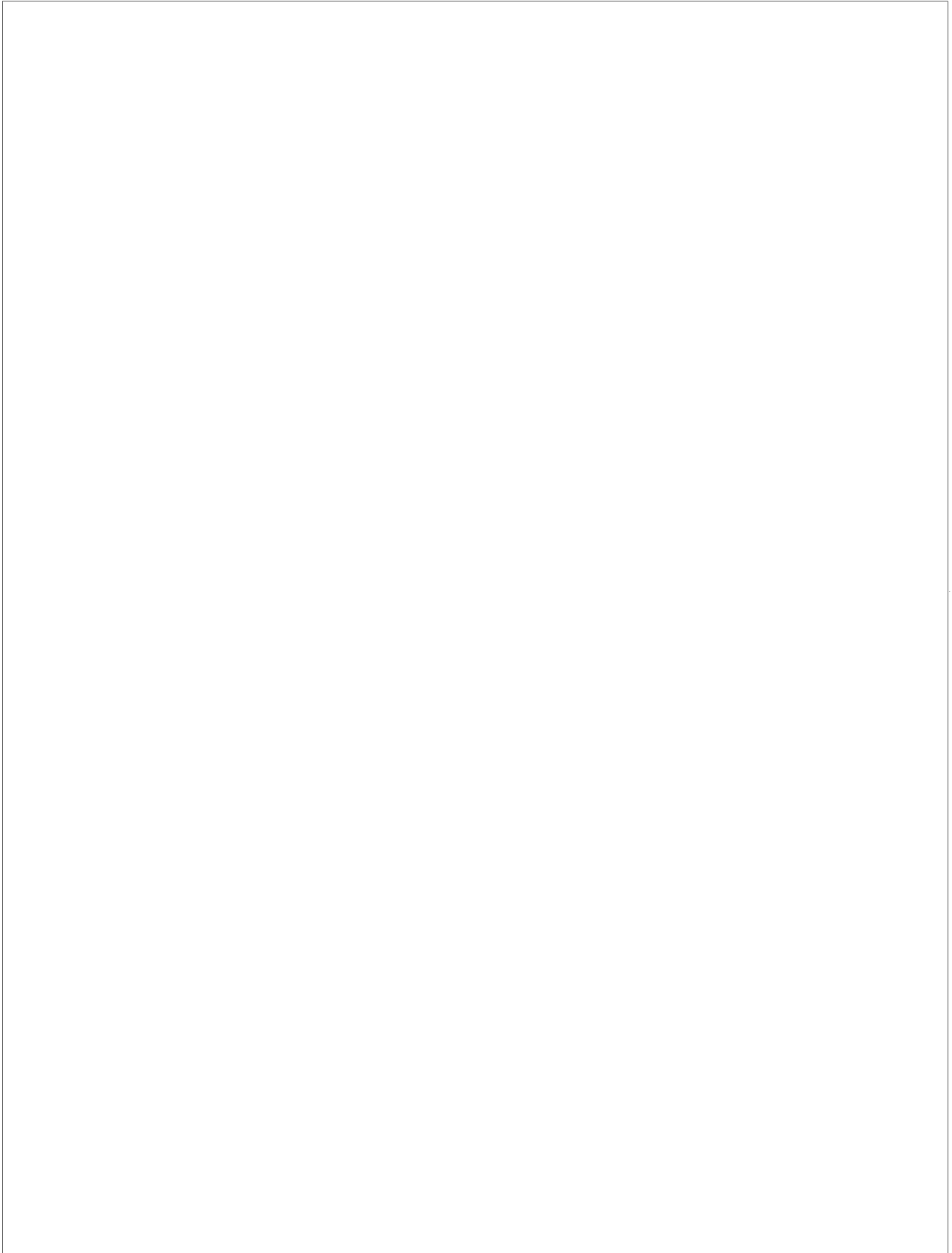
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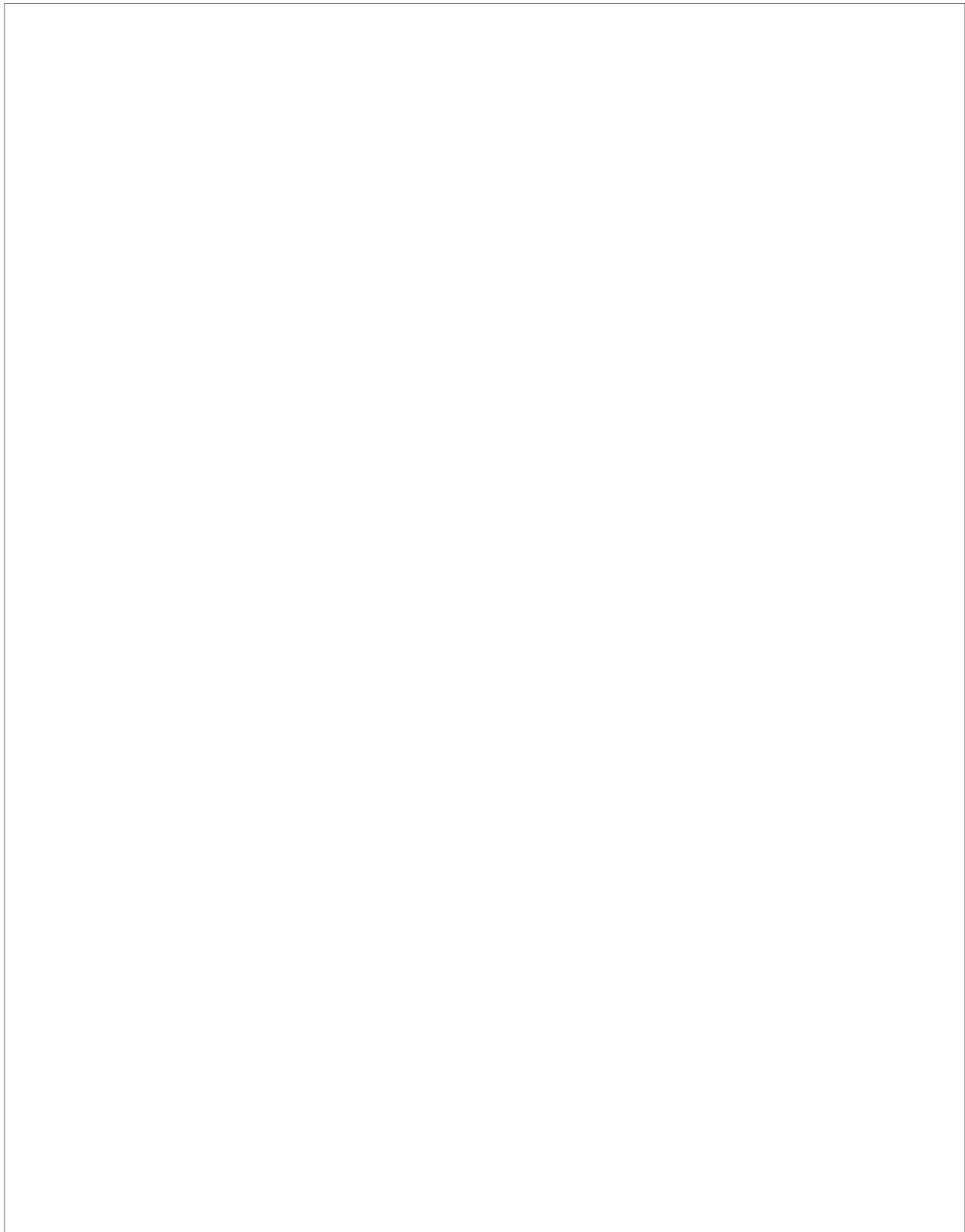
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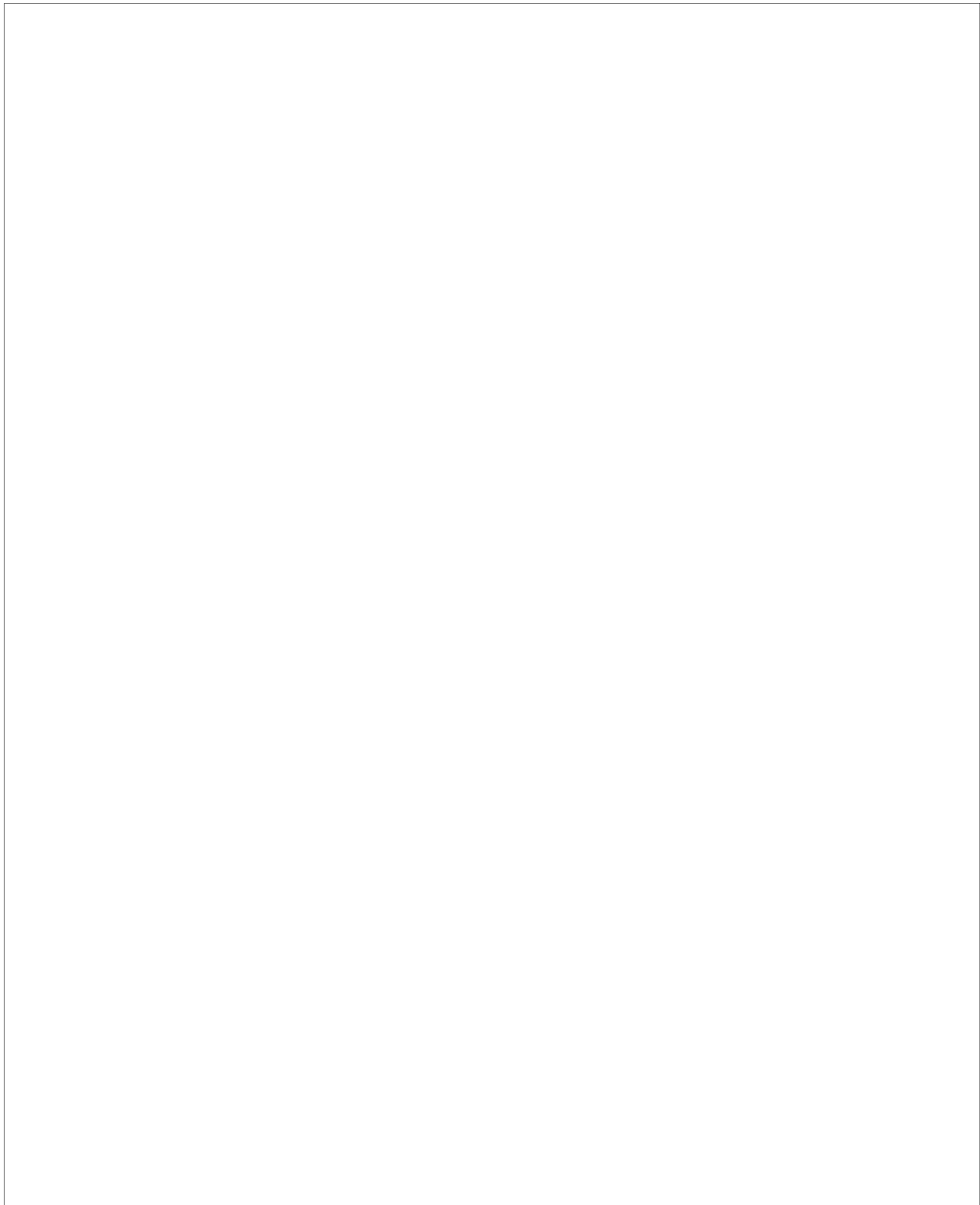
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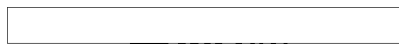
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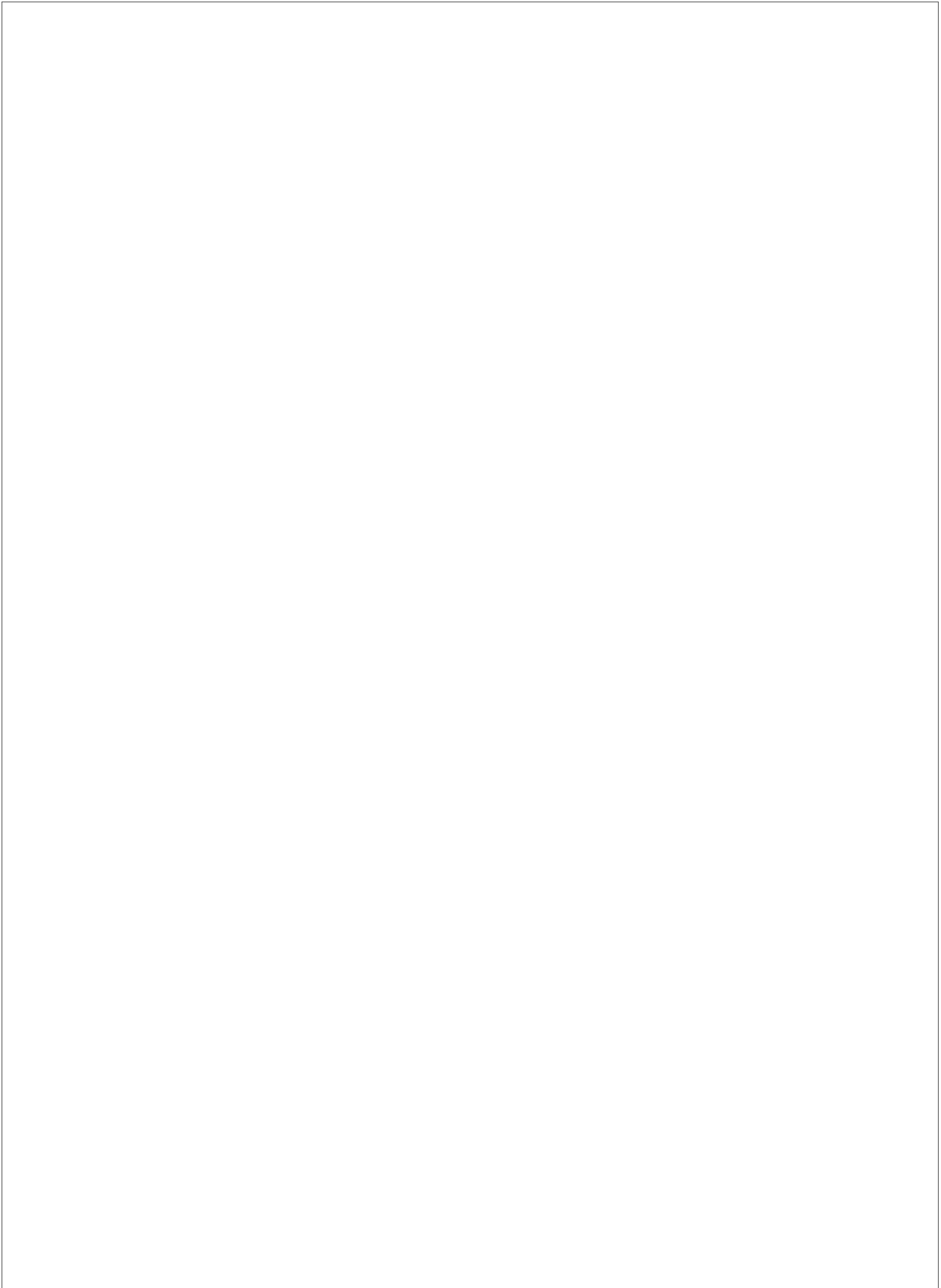
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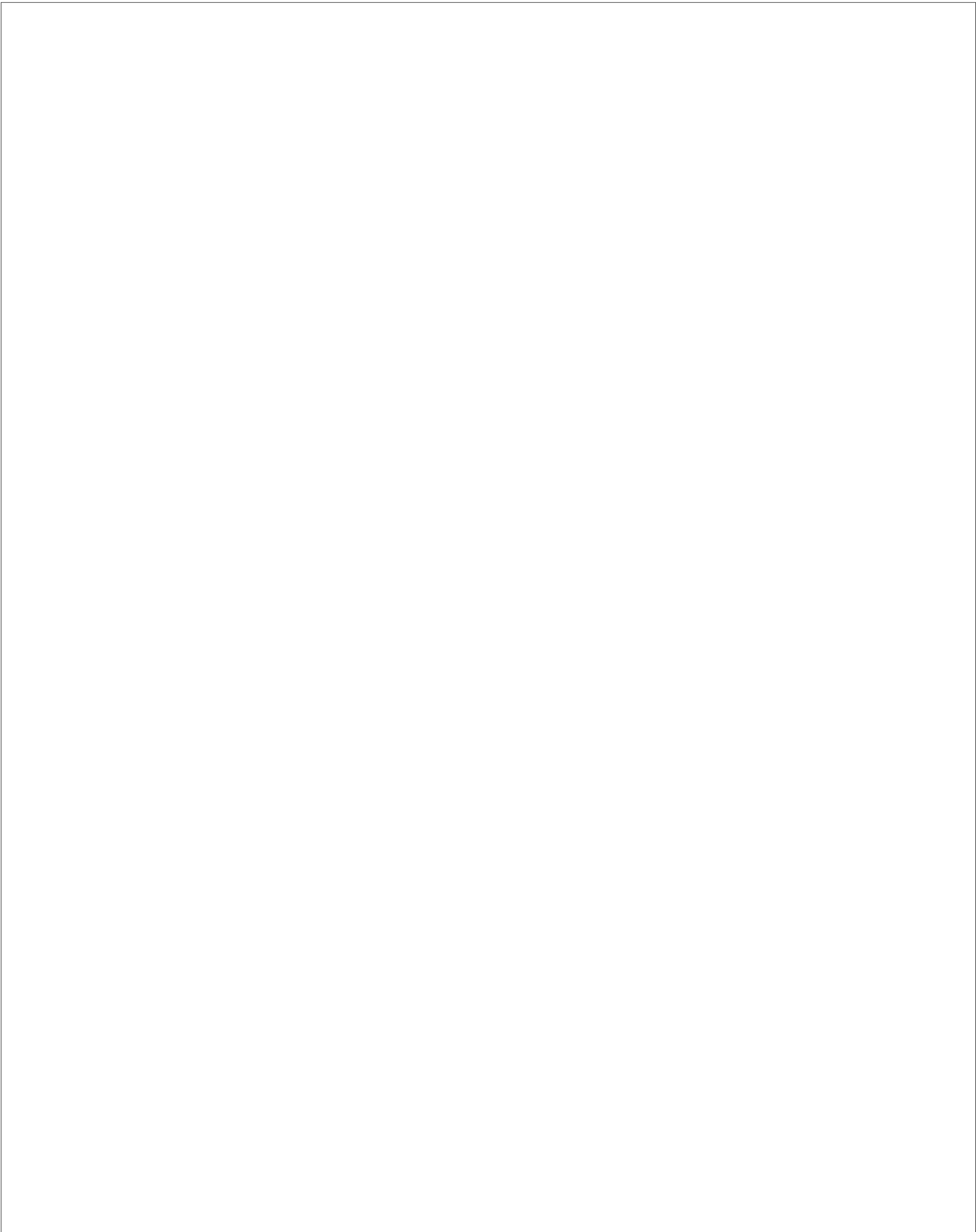
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